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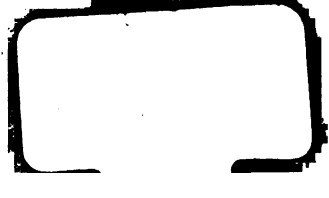

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AN
(Ferguson R)
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WILLIAM RUSSELL. L. L. D.

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LIVES

OF

SCOTISH AUTHORS;

VIZ.

FERGUSSON, FALCONER,

AND

RUSSELL.

By DAVID IRVING, A. M.

Nemo confidat nimium fecundis;
Nemo desperet meliora lapsis.
Nemo tam divos habuit faventes,
Crastinum ut possit sibi polliceri.

SENECA.

Edinburgh:
PRINTED BY J. PILLANS AND SONS,
FOR A. CONSTABLE.

1801.

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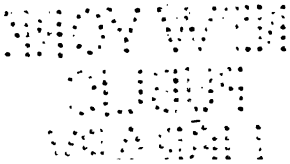

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TO

ANDREW DALZEL, F.R.S.E.

PROFESSOR OF GREEK IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.

SIR,

THE politeneſs with which you undertook to procure materials for the lives of FALCONER and RUSSELL, and the punctuality with which you have performed your promiſe, induce me to prefix your name to the following juvenile performance. Though for a long ſeries of years your attention has been

James Thom 19 March 1751

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ſteadily directed towards the learning of ancient times, yet your unaffected zeal on the preſent occaſion ſufficiently demonſtrates, that you are not indifferent with regard to the lives and writings of any of your countrymen who, in an unpropitious ſituation, have manifeſted a laudable ambition of literary diſtinction. The deſire of honeſt fame is one of thoſe amiable propenſities of our nature which, wherever they may chance to diſplay themſelves, muſt be contemplated with ſentiments of genuine pleaſure. When this deſire actuates the man who enjoys all the advantages which affluence is capable of beſtowing, we cannot withhold the tribute of reſpect: but when it ennobles the mind of him who has been nurſed in the lap of poverty and misfortune,

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our reſpect is neceſſarily converted into admiration. We always reflect with delight upon thoſe mental energies which enable the individual to riſe ſuperior to the circumſtances of external ſituation.

Of the mode in which I have diſcharged the duty of a literary biographer, the candid and intelligent reader muſt be left to judge. To whatever verdict may be pronounced, I ſhall endeavour to ſubmit without repining. In extenuation of the numerous faults which may perhaps be diſcovered in the following pages, ſuffer me to avail myſelf of the apologetic obſervation of a philoſophical poet whom you juſtly regard with the higheſt admiration:

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Χρὴ δὲ συγγνώμην ἔχειν,
Εἴ τις γ' ὑφ' ἥδης σπλάγχνον ἔντονον φέρων,
Μάταια βάζει.

EURIPIDES.

Whatever may be the reception of this little work, its publication will at leaſt afford me one gratification; as it preſents me with a proper opportunity of expreſſing the high degree of reſpect which I entertain for your character as a man and a ſcholar.—I am, Sir, your moſt obedient humble ſervant,

DAVID IRVING.

K. James's College, Edinburgh,
Decem. 31. 1800.

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ERRATA.

Page 12. *line* 15. for *heterogenous* read *heterogeneous.*

13. 11. for *which*, read *whom.*

19. 20. for ἀκρατῆ read ἀκρατῆ.

39. 7. for *ſentiment* read *ſentiments.*

44. 24. after *cælo* inſert a period.

56. 17. for *the latter*, read *Nemeſian.*

59. 19. for *talents*, read *talent.*

68. ult. in ſome copies, for *ſuſpect*, read *to ſuſpect.*

102. 18. for *precedure* read *procedure.*

119. 3. for *ſo*, read *for.*

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THE

LIFE

OF

ROBERT FERGUSSON.

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THE

LIFE

OF

ROBERT FERGUSSON.

THE biography of literary men ſometimes conſiſts of a mere enumeration of ſucceſſive misfortunes occaſioned by their own want of prudence and ſobriety. Of the truth of this aſſertion, the perſonal hiſtory of Fergusſon affords a freſh and a melancholy illuſtration.

It is to be wiſhed that his life had been delineated by ſome one endowed with more vigorous faculties than the preſent writer will be found to poſſeſs, and furniſhed with more ample information than his utmoſt exertions have enabled him to procure. An impreſſive account of the ſhort and headlong career of

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this moſt unfortunate poet, might be rendered not only highly intereſting, but even of conſiderable advantage to ſociety. By preſenting to the eyes of inexperience, a faithful picture of the evils by which imprudent conduct is ever accompanied, it might poſſibly excite in young and ſuſceptible minds, a ſteady averſion from thoſe practices which tended to involve Ferguſſon in the deepeſt calamities. For, as Iſocrates has juſtly obſerved, we are moſt inclined to receive good counſel when we behold the miſery occaſioned by the temerity of others. By witneſſing the afflictions of thoſe that are pining in ſickneſs, we are led to beſtow unuſual care upon the preſervation of our own health *.

As little curioſity has hitherto been diſcovered with regard to his perſonal hiſtory, the collecting of materials for the following ſketch has been attended with ſome difficulty. In the performance of this taſk, I have been chiefly aided by the friendly exertions of Dr Robert Anderſon, a gentleman not more diſtinguiſhed for his ingenuity and learning, than for the amiable benevolence of his mind; a

* Iſocratis Orat. ad Demonic. § 58.

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gentleman to whom our national literature is more indebted, than to the collective body of Scotiſh nobility *.

Robert Fergusſon was born at Edinburgh on the 5th of September, 1750. His father, William Fergusſon, who in his youth had diſcovered ſome propenſity to the ſtudy of poetry, maintained a reſpectable character in the humble ſtation in which he found himſelf placed. He ſerved an apprenticeſhip to a tradeſman in Aberdeen, and about the year 1746 came to Edinburgh, in order to ſolicit employment. Having been engaged as a clerk by ſeveral different maſters, and theſe too of various occupations, he at length procured the office of an accountant in the Britiſh Linen Hall, in which he continued till the time of his death.

* Dr Anderſon, who has already deſerved ſo well from the republic of letters, is at preſent preparing for the preſs, an improved edition of his *Lives of the Britiſh Poets*, detached from the complete collection of their reſpective works. In this form, the book will contain many additional articles. The biography of Maſon, Jones, Warton, and Cowper, poets lately deceaſed, will probably be included. When completed according to his preſent views of the ſubject, this work will prove a moſt valuable acceſſion to Engliſh literature.

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Young Ferguſſon was of a conſtitution ſo extremely delicate, that he was incapable of attending the ſchool till after he had reached the ſixth year of his age. He was then ſent to a Mr Philps, who at that time reſided in Blackfriars wynd; and under his tuition was qualified for attending the high ſchool in the ſpace of little more than ſix months. While he continued at this excellent ſeminary, the infirm ſtate of his health prevented him from giving the proper attendance: yet by means of his ſuperior capacity, aided by a generous ſpirit of emulation, he excelled moſt of his companions. It was during theſe intervals in which the delicacy of his frame confined him at home, that he firſt diſcovered a reliſh for books. He gratified his taſte by the eager peruſal of ſuch works as chance threw in his way: and his interrogations concerning any ſubject which attracted his attention, often puzzled thoſe much older than himſelf.

Having continued four years at the grammar-ſchool of Edinburgh, he was next removed to that of Dundee, where he remained two years longer.

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In both theſe ſeminaries he made a ſurpriſing progreſs.

He was originally intended for the church: and his friends were ſo fortunate as to procure him a burſary in the univerſity of St Andrew's; where he entered as a ſtudent at the age of thirteen. Here he ſoon became diſtinguiſhed as a youth of ſuperior genius, and rendered himſelf conſpicuous as "a fellow of infinite jeſt, of moſt excellent fancy." His ingenuity recommended him to the favour of Dr Wilkie, who was then profeſſor of natural philoſophy in that univerſity. It has been aſſerted, that Wilkie frequently employed him to read his academical prelections, when ſickneſs or other caſual circumſtances prevented him from performing that duty himſelf. But before this report can gain any credit, it muſt be better authenticated. A boy of ſixteen or ſeventeen years of age mounting the profeſſorial roſtrum, would afford an exhibition of a ſingular kind. It is probable, too, that he was always much more diſtinguiſhed for his poetical genius, than for his talents in inveſtigating ſubjects connected with natural philoſophy. Certain it is, how-

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ever, that Wilkie honoured him with particular marks of diſtinction. Nor were theſe beſtowed on an ungrateful object: upon the death of his patron, which happened on the 10th of October, 1772, he offered a tribute of warm affection to his memory.

Dr Wilkie was a man of vigorous faculties, and of much acquired knowledge: and if his poetical talents have failed to ſecure him a ſolid and extenſive reputation, this circumſtance muſt be attributed to his unfortunate choice of a ſubject. By claſſical ſcholars the *Epigoniad* will always be peruſed with no ſmall degree of pleaſure; though in the majority of readers it is certainly incapable of exciting much intereſt.

During his reſidence at St Andrew's, Fergusſon began to turn his attention to the ſtudy of poetry, and wrote ſeveral copies of verſes, which attracted the particular notice of the profeſſors, as well as that of his fellow-ſtudents. Here he alſo formed the plan of a tragedy on the ſtory of Sir William Wallace; of which, when he had finiſhed the two firſt acts, he relinquiſhed the deſign, becauſe, as we are

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told, he had ſeen another dramatic poem on the ſame ſubject, and was apprehenſive leſt his ſhould be regarded as a mere copy *. This ſeems a very inadequate reaſon: authors who write on the ſame ſubject are not under the neceſſity of ſtealing from each other.

Whether any particular æra of the life of this renowned warrior may afford matter for a regular tragedy, appears ſomewhat doubtful. His life was glorious and eventful; but it preſents few dramatic incidents which could be rendered intereſting by any writer whoſe genius does not bear a reſemblance to that of Shakeſpeare.

At ſome time or other, Fergusſon ſeems to have had another theatrical ſcheme floating in his mind. Two or three ſpeeches in his own hand-writing are to be found on the blank leaves of Anderſon's *Defence of the Preſbyterians*, a book which was formerly in his poſſeſſion †. The following verſes are all that can be diſtinctly read:

* Supplement to the Encyc. Britan.

† Mr Anderſon, whoſe memory has been celebrated by the in-

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Therefore 'tis meet that Siſera be crown'd
With all the honour worthy of his ſervice,
And that this day for mirth be ſet apart
To celebrate the deeds, and valiant acts
Diſplay'd by him in war.

Conqueſt alone, my liege, repays our toil;
But ſince it is your ſovereign inclination
This day to grace us with a pompous triumph,
As ſwift as thought my deeds ſhall fly to ſerve
In all your after battles.

Theſe lines are evidently puerile; yet they may be conſidered as an object of ſome curioſity.

Though he was never very remarkable for his application to ſtudy, yet he performed, with a ſufficient ſhare of applauſe, the various exerciſes which the rules of his college preſcribed. The calm and even tenor, however, of an academic life was but ill calculated to afford him much ſatisfaction or enjoyment. His natural propenſity to mirth and gaiety often cauſed him to relax in his exertions. He bore a principal part in a thouſand youthful frolics; many of which are ſtill remembered at St Andrew's.

genious and unfortunate Boyſe, was the grandfather of the late Profeſſor Anderſon of Glaſgow.

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What amuſed himſelf, tended to diſturb the quiet of others. His miſdemeanours were either ſo frequent, or of ſuch a kind, that, after a reſidence of four years, he expoſed himſelf to the diſgrace of a formal expulſion from the univerſity. The eloquence of Dr Wilkie was powerfully exerted in his behalf, but without producing the deſired effect: the other members of the *Senatus Academicus* were by no means diſpoſed to liſten to his arguments; and the imprudent youth was accordingly diſmiſſed.

His proſpect of entering into the church being thus cloſed, he returned to Edinburgh. This is a circumſtance which he was far from regretting. It may readily be conceived, that to him the duties of a clergyman preſented few allurements. And indeed, to a man of delicate ſenſibility, the ſituation of a parochial miniſter can never be ſuppoſed to open a very inviting proſpect: he is perpetually expoſed to the anathemas of thoſe who, on every occaſion, ſtand prepared to wreſt the vindictive thunder from the hands of Omnipotence.

About two years before his return from college,

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his father died, leaving his family in a ſtate of poverty and dejection. He now found himſelf without any preſent employment, and without any fixed reſolution concerning his future purſuits; a ſituation dangerous beyond all others to a young man of a fervid imagination.

Some of his friends adviſed him to devote himſelf to the ſtudy of medicine; but he declined following this advice, becauſe, according to his own account, he fancied himſelf afflicted with every diſeaſe of which he read the deſcription. A ſimilar anecdote is related of John Bois, one of the tranſlators of the *Bible* in the reign of King James VI.

He had a maternal uncle living near Aberdeen, a Mr John Forbes, who was in pretty affluent circumſtances. To him he paid a viſit, in hopes of procuring ſome ſuitable employment through his influence. Mr Forbes at firſt treated him with civility; but, inſtead of exerting himſelf to promote his intereſt, ſuffered him to remain ſix months in his houſe, and afterwards diſmiſſed him in a manner which reflects very little honour on his memory. His clothes were

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beginning to assume a thread-bare appearance; and on this account, he was deemed an improper guest for his uncle's house. Filled with indignation at the unworthy treatment which he had received, he retired to a little solitary inn that stood at a small distance; and having procured pen, ink, and paper, wrote a letter to his unfeeling relation, couched in terms of manly resentment. After his departure, Mr Forbes seems to have relented: he dispatched a messenger to him with a few shillings to bear his expences on the road. This paltry present the lowness of his funds compelled him to accept. He set out for Edinburgh on foot, and with much difficulty reached his mother's house. The fatigues of the journey, added to the depression of his mind, produced such an effect upon his delicate constitution, that for several days he was afflicted with a severe illness. When he began to recover strength, he endeavoured to console his grief by composing a poem on the *Decay of Friendship*, and another *Against Repining at Fortune*.

A short while after the above occurrence, he was employed in the commissary-clerk's office; but being unable to submit to the tyranny of the deputy,

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he ſoon relinquiſhed his ſituation. Having again remained for a conſiderable time without any occupation, he was next received into the office of the ſheriff-clerk. Here he continued during the reſt of his life.

The report of his having attempted the ſtudy of law, is devoid of all foundation. Between ſtudying law and tranſcribing law-papers, there is certainly a very material diſtinction. And indeed the degree of application neceſſary for rendering a man eminent in this profeſſion, would have been ſufficient to deter him from entering upon it, even though his fortune and connections in life had afforded the moſt ſanguine hopes of ſucceſs. Poetry and law are things too heterogenous in their nature often to unite in the ſame individual. The example of Davies and Jones * has demonſtrated, that ſuch

* Sir John Davies's poem on the *Original Nature and Immortality of the Soul* is a work of ſingular ingenuity. To render the inveſtigation of an abſtract ſubject agreeable and intereſting, is found to be a very difficult taſk, even when the writer employs the more diffuſe language of proſe: but this difficulty muſt be greatly increaſed when he is fettered by the rules of verſe. Davies, however, has ſurmounted every obſtacle. The acuteneſs of his genius

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a union is by no means impoſſible: it muſt however be allowed to be extremely rare. The acquired habits peculiar to the lawyer and to the poet are eſſentially different.

'Tis a curious fact, that ſeveral very eminent poets

having enabled him to form juſt and clear notions of the ſubjects which fell under his review, he has not only treated them with wonderful perſpicuity, but has even found means to embelliſh them with many poetical ornaments.

Sir William Jones is to be regarded as one of the completeſt ſcholars which Britain has hitherto produced. His poems evince much vigour of imagination.

Upon his having reſolved to devote himſelf to the ſtudy of law, he compoſed the following valedictory addreſs to his Muſe; which is to be found at the end of a volume containing his *Poeſeos Aſiaticæ Commentarii*, and other learned treatiſes.

Vale, Camena, blanda cultrix ingeni,
Virtutis altrix, mater eloquentiæ;
Linquenda alumno eſt laurus et chelys tuo.
At, O Dearum dulcium dulciſſima,
Seu Suada mavis ſive Pitho dicier,
A te receptus in tua vivam fide:
Mihi ſit, oro, non inutilis toga,
Nec indiſerta lingua, nec turpis manus!

Poetical reſolutions are ſeldom kept: Jones afterwards recalled the Muſe whom he had thus expreſſed his determination to abandon.

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were originally deſtined for the bar, and after having for a ſhort time ſubmitted to the preparatory ſtudy, at length abandoned it in diſguſt. Among this number we find the illuſtrious names of Taſſo, Arioſto, Petrarch, Corneille, and Rowe.

By proper application to buſineſs, he might now have been enabled to earn a comfortable ſubſiſtence; but unfortunately he conſidered the duties of his office as only of inferior moment. He employed himſelf principally either in the cultivation of his poetical talents, or in the eager purſuit of every object which promiſed to afford unprofitable amuſement.

Long before he had reached the twentieth year of his age, many of his little pieces made their appearance in Ruddiman's *Weekly Magazine*, a well-conducted miſcellany, which was enriched with the vernal bloſſoms of Anderſon, Graeme, Bruce, and Macpherſon. To this publication he was a conſtant contributor. The proprietor occaſionally allowed him ſome pecuniary compenſation; but he never wrote for any ſtipulated reward.

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To trace him through the whole of his poetical progress, would be a task productive of much trouble to the writer, and of little entertainment to the reader. His poems are too numerous to admit of particular enumeration.

Most of the subjects on which he wrote, were suggested by the occurrences of the day.

Upon Sir John Fielding's interference in order to prohibit the performance of the *Beggar's Opera*, he addressed a satirical epistle to that active magistrate. In this instance he appears to have acted from mistaken motives: the conduct of Sir John in endeavouring to prevent the pernicious consequences which were frequently known to result from the representation of that drama, must certainly be regarded as highly laudable.

The panegyric on Gay contained in this epistle will scarcely be found authorised by the uniform tenor of that poet's writings: the moral tendency of some of his poems cannot be commended.

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In order to ridicule the ſeſquipedalian ſtyle which ſometimes occurs in the works of Dr Johnſon, he preſented him with *Food for a New Edition of his Dictionary.* To our riſible faculty this poem addreſſes itſelf with conſiderable effect: but it was not from the attack of ſuch an adverſary that the reputation of that mighty genius could receive the ſmalleſt diminution.

In a poem entitled an *Expedition to Fife*, he happened to caſt ſome reflections on that diſtrict, branding it as "the moſt unhallowed 'midſt the Scotian plains." This aſperſion drew a formal challenge from a Fifeſhire gentleman, who appears to have poſſeſſed in an eminent degree the true Scotiſh ſpirit of locality. Inſtead of accepting his antagoniſt's invitation, he treated it with that contempt which it ſo juſtly merited. To this tranſaction he has alluded in the concluſion of his addreſs *To the Principal and Profeſſors of the Univerſity of St Andrew's;* a poem in which he again finds an opportunity of diſcovering his antipathy to Dr Johnſon.

The public immediately began to perceive the real value of his productions; and from the time of

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their first appearance in the *Weekly Magazine*, he was regarded as a poet of no ordinary talents. As the charms of his social qualities were even superior to those of his poetry, it is not surprising that his company was eagerly solicited by people of every description. To the circles where gaiety and humour prevailed, his conversation recommended itself by every possible allurement; and where a more grave deportment was necessary, he could accommodate his manners to those of the individuals with whom he was casually associated. Such qualities as these, without producing any beneficial effects, tended to connect him with thoughtless and unprincipled companions, who gradually conducted him through the various stages of vice and dissipation. From the careless of the moment he could derive no solid advantage. Those who have spent an extatic evening in the company of some man of intellectual eminence, are often very little solicitous with regard to the manner in which he disposes of himself after the hour of separation. The object for which they solicited his company being obtained, they seldom exert themselves in order to place him in a situation adequate to his merit, and congenial to his wishes.

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This cenſure, however, muſt not be received without limitation. Ferguſſon had contracted an intimacy with a gentleman of the name of Burnet, who afterwards ſettled in the Eaſt Indies. Mr Burnet was ſo captivated with his ingenuity and amiable manners, that when he had arranged his own affairs, he reſolved to provide for his leſs fortunate friend. In purſuance of this laudable deſign, he ſent him a cordial invitation to come over to India, and at the ſame time remitted him a draught of one hundred pounds, for defraying the expences which he might incur in preparing for the voyage. But, alas! this bounty arrived too late; for he had then paid the debt of nature. Yet although Mr Burnet's benevolent intentions were thus fruſtrated by the ſtroke of death, it may ſtill afford him a very pleaſing reflection, that, of all thoſe who were acquainted with the merits of Ferguſſon, he was the only perſon that ſtretched forth his hand in order to reſcue him from the uncomfortable ſituation in which he ſpent the greater part of his life. Such an action reflects honour on humanity.

The latter part of his life was ſpent in perpetual

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diſſipation. Though penury confined him within a narrower circle, yet his gaiety and licentiouſneſs bore conſiderable reſemblance to that of Rocheſter, Sedley, and other poets of the court of Charles II. The unpleaſant ſituation to which he had reduced himſelf, prepared him for graſping at every object which promiſed a temporary alleviation of his cares. And as his funds were often in an exhauſted ſtate, he at length had recourſe to mean and deſpicable ſhifts, in order to procure a little ſenſual gratification. In proportion as our reliſh for animal pleaſure increaſes, our enjoyment of intellectual pleaſure is found to diminiſh; and when the former is purſued with avidity, its deluded votary ſoon expoſes himſelf to contempt and miſery.

Aſſociates poſſeſſed of the ſame taſte for letters, and of the ſame ruinous habits of intemperance, were not wanting *. Men of this ſeeming incongruity

* Οὐδὲν γὰρ κωλύει εἰδέναι μὲν γράμματα, κὴ καλίχειν τὰ μαθήματα πάντα, ὁμοίως δὲ μέθυσον κὴ ἀκρατῆ εἶναι.

CEBETIS Tabula.

One of Ferguſſon's moſt intimate friends was William Green.

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of character have always abounded in the northern as well as in the ſouthern metropolis.

When he contemplated the high hopes from which he had fallen, his mind was viſited with bitter re-

law; of whom it may not here be improper to give ſome account. The following anecdotes appeared in the *Edinburgh Magazine and Review* a few weeks after his death.

"On June the twenty-ſixth died at Edinburgh, Mr William Greenlaw, preacher of the goſpel, in the ſixty-third year of his age. Though he followed not the profeſſion to which he was bred, he was deeply ſkilled in theology: the few diſcourſes he compoſed diſcovered an abundance of matter that would have ſparkled through entire volumes of modern ſermons. His views alſo in aſtronomy and all the branches of mathematics were profound and uncommon, but he meant chiefly to diſtinguiſh himſelf by his knowledge of the learned languages; the ſtudy of them was the great object of his life, and the progreſs he made in them was proportioned to his acuteneſs and aſſiduity. He taught them privately in Edinburgh above twenty years; and there was ſo little jealouſy in his nature, that he freely beſtowed his knowledge on thoſe teachers who wiſhed to profit by his communications. What peculiarly diſtinguiſhed him, was a flow of inoffenſive humour, a gift rarely poſſeſſed by the natives of Scotland. His heart was warm and open, his ſocial ſpirit unbounded. Of money he profeſſed a contempt, and he refuſed a living which his friends would have preſſed upon him. With an ambition to excel, he was yet careleſs of his reputation. Conſcious of his own merit, he allowed men to judge of him as they pleaſed. His manners were ſimple, his figure ungainly. In a

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morſe. But the reſolutions of amendment which he formed were always of ſhort duration. He was ſoon reſubdued by the allurements of vice. At one time he evinced a determination to enter upon a more ſober and retired courſe of life, and, in conſequence of this plan, took lodgings at a ſmall diſtance from town. Here, however, he continued for a very ſhort ſeaſon.

From an epigram to be found among his poſthumous pieces, it appears that he had conceived the deſign of abandoning the ſcene of his follies, and trying his fortune at ſea. But this ſcheme was alſo relinquiſhed.

Of a ſpouting club which had been inſtituted in Edinburgh he became a diſtinguiſhed member. His talents for mimickry were unrivalled: the reputation which he here acquired in exhibiting imitations

licentious age he made a vow of chaſtity, and, what is more ſurpriſing, he kept it. The laſt years of his life were rather unfortunate; the conſtant uſe he had made of his faculties ſeems to have impaired them. But he had not the miſery to ſurvive their extinction; death came to him when his friends wiſhed for it."

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of the moſt eminent actors of the Edinburgh theatre, inſpired him with diſtant thoughts of mounting the ſtage. This ended like the reſt of his projects: he ſtill found himſelf incapable of active exertion, and unequal to the taſk of emancipating himſelf from the domination of vicious habits.

His conduct was very far from being prudent; yet it muſt be remembered that man is in a great meaſure the child of circumſtances. The natural bias of Fergusſon's mind prompted him ſtrongly to the practice of virtue; but the force of ſurrounding temptations turned him aſide to the paths of vice. To the eye of philanthropy his progreſs through life preſents a ſucceſſion of objects dark and gloomy. He found himſelf on the vaſt theatre of human life, without friends to ſhelter him from the ſtorms of adverſity, and with ſcarce one ray of hope to brighten his future proſpects.

Notwithſtanding the miſerable ſtate of diſſipation into which he had plunged himſelf, his poetical ſtudies were never totally neglected. In 1773 he publiſhed a collection of his poems, conſiſting of ſuch

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pieces as had appeared in Ruddiman's *Weekly Magazine*, with the addition of a few others.

Auld Reikie made its appearance in the course of the same year. It was inscribed to Sir William Forbes, in terms of sufficient modesty and respect: but that worthy baronet seems to have despised

> The poor ovations of a minstrel's praise.
>
> PARK *.

He was somewhat offended at the liberty which had thus been assumed with regard to his name.

This ingenious poem it was his intention to extend at some future period to a much greater length; but what was originally offered as a first canto, has never received any important additions.

In 1774 his friends prevailed upon him to com-

* Mr Park is the author of a small volume of elegant and agreeable poetry, which, though little known in this part of the kingdom, has obtained a considerable degree of popularity in England.

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poſe an elegiac poem on the death of Mr Cunningham, who as a paſtoral poet has obtained conſiderable celebrity. It was publiſhed for the benefit of the unfortunate author, who was then verging towards that ſtate of inſanity in which he at length cloſed his miſerable exiſtence *. As he was then incapable of ſuperintending the preſs, ſome of his friends kindly undertook that office.

This was the laſt of his productions. His body being now emaciated with diſeaſe, and his mind totally unhinged, his relations began to obſerve in his behaviour ſomething of an infantine caſt: he talked in an incoherent manner, and frequently manifeſted an entire vacillation of thought.

Of perſons in his condition ſome leading object generally engroſſes the attention, to the almoſt total excluſion of every other: the power of judgement is ſuperſeded, and that of imagination uſurps its place. Religion preſented itſelf to Ferguſſon; and this he made the conſtant theme of his diſcourſe.

* Anderſon's Life of Cunningham.

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Between his case and that of Collins, as well as of Smart, a very evident distinction obtains. He was approaching towards the last stage of mania; whereas they were only visited with "that depression of mind which enchains the faculties, without destroying them, and leaves reason the knowledge of right, without the power of pursuing it *."

* Johnson's Life of Collins.

"Smart's melancholy shewed itself only in a preternatural excitement to prayer, which he held it as a duty not to controul or repress; taking *au pied de la lettre* our blessed Saviour's injunction to *pray without ceasing*. So that beginning by regular addresses at stated times to the Almighty, he went on to call his friends from their dinners, or beds, or places of recreation, whenever that impulse towards prayer pressed upon his mind. In every other transaction of life no man's wits could be more regular than those of Smart; for this prevalence of one idea pertinaciously keeping the first place in his head, had in no sense, except what immediately related to itself, perverted his judgement at all; his opinions were unchanged as before, nor did he seem more likely to fall into a state of distraction than any other man; less so perhaps, as he calmed every start of violent passion by prayer.——I well remember how after the commission was put in force, poor fellow! he got money from the keeper of the mad-house for teaching his little boys Latin,—a proof, as vulgar people would imagine, that his intellects were sound; for mean observers suppose all madness to be phrenzy, and think a person insane in proportion as he is wild, and disposed to throw the things about; whereas experience shows that such temporary suspensions of the mental

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Such of his manuſcripts as were in his own poſſeſſion he committed indiſcriminately to the flames, and was heard to declare that he felt ſome conſolation in never having *publiſhed* any work hoſtile to the intereſts of religion. Thoſe ſtudies which had formerly been the ſolace of his cares were now utterly neglected: he laid every other book aſide, and made the *Bible* his conſtant companion; a circumſtance in which he reſembled the ingenious though ill-fated Collins †.

It is frequently alledged, that the religious deſpondency which at firſt ſeized him, was unaccompanied

faculties are oftener connected with *delirium* than with *mania*, and, if not encouraged by drunkenneſs, are ſeldom of long duration; whereas in notional and ideal madneſs, particularly the firſt, many ſymptoms are only cunningly ſuppreſſed, not cured; couched like a cataract in the eye, but not eradicated, and ſtill perceptible enough to thoſe who make ſuch maladies their own particular ſtudy."

PIOZZI's Britiſh Synonomy, vol. ii. p. 3.

† He had withdrawn from ſtudy, and travelled with no other book than an Engliſh Teſtament, ſuch as children carry to the ſchool; when his friend took it into his hand, out of curioſity to ſee what companion a man of letters had choſen, "I have but one book," ſaid Collins, "but it is the beſt."

JOHNSON's Life of Collins.

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with any ſymptoms of irrationality. Of the improbability of this aſſertion, the following anecdote may be regarded as a ſtriking proof. Mr Woods of the theatre royal, who had cultivated his acquaintance before it ceaſed to be reputable, chanced to meet him one day paſſing under the North Bridge in a diſordered manner, and regardleſs of every ſurrounding object. Upon his friend's accoſting him, he ſaid he had juſt diſcovered one of the reprobates who crucified our Saviour; and that, in order to bring him to condign puniſhment, he was making all poſſible haſte to lodge the information with Lord Kames. Such a notion could only have found a place in the brain of inſanity.

Having experienced a temporary relief from his dreadful malady, he again began to viſit his friends, but had one night the misfortune to fall from a ſtaircaſe, and receive a violent contuſion on the head. When carried home, he could give no account of the accident, and ſeemed altogether inſenſible of his own deplorable ſituation. He at length became ſo outrageous, that it was not without ſome difficulty

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that the united force of ſeveral men could reſtrain his violence.

As his afflicted mother was not in a condition to command the proper attendance in her own houſe, ſhe was under the neceſſity of removing him to the public aſylum. A few of his moſt intimate friends having watched a proper opportunity, found means to convey him thither, by decoying him into a chair, as if he had been about to pay ſome evening viſit. When they reached the place of their deſtination, all was wrapt in profound ſilence. The poor youth entered the diſmal manſion. He caſt his eyes wildly around, and began to perceive his real ſituation. The diſcovery awaked every feeling of his ſoul. He raiſed a hideous ſhout, which being returned by the wretched inhabitants of every cell, echoed along the vaulted roofs, and produced in the minds of his companions ſentiments of unſpeakable horror. They ſtood aghaſt at the dreadful ſcene; the impreſſion which it made, was too deep for time ever to efface.

When he was afterwards viſited by his mother

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and elder ſiſter, his phrenſy had almoſt entirely ſubſided. He had at firſt imagined himſelf a king or ſome other great perſonage, and had adorned his head with a crown of ſtraw. The deluſion, however, was now vaniſhed. Upon their entrance, they found him lying in his cell, to appearance calm and collected. He told them he was ſenſible of their kindneſs, and hoped he ſhould ſoon be in a condition to receive their viſits. He alſo recalled to their memory the preſentiment which he had ſo often expreſſed of his being at length overwhelmed by this moſt dreadful of all calamities; but endeavoured to comfort them with aſſurances of his being humanely treated in the aſylum. He entreated his ſiſter to bring her work along with her, and frequently ſit by him, in order to diſpel the gloom which overcaſt his mind. To all this they could only anſwer with their ſighs and tears.

From the tenor of his behaviour upon this occaſion, his mother was led to entertain hopes of his ſpeedy recovery. A remittance from her ſon Henry having now rendered her more eaſy in her circumſtances, ſhe determined to remove him to her own houſe,

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and immediately began to make the proper arrangements for his reception. But, alas! theſe hopes were only deluſive. Within the ſpace of a few days a meſſenger announced the melancholy tidings that her beloved ſon had breathed his laſt. The violent exertions of his mind had gradually ruined the animal ſyſtem; and at length he was ſo much exhauſted, that he expired without a groan. He died on the 16th of October, 1774, after having continued about two months in bedlam. Such was the life, and ſuch the lamentable death, of Robert Ferguſſon, a youth whom nature had rendered capable of nobler exertion; a youth whoſe misfortunes cannot fail to command our pity, though his miſconduct may expoſe him to our cenſure.

His remains were decently interred in the Canongate church-yard; and for a conſiderable time there was no ſtone to mark the place of his duſt. In a late publication it has been erroneouſly aſſerted, that "his friends erected a monument to his memory, which has ſince been removed to make way for a larger and more elegant monument by his enthuſiaſtic admirer the late poet Burns." His friends

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were in no condition to rear ſepulchral fabrics; and this *larger and more elegant monument* is almoſt as plain a ſtone as ever graced a country church-yard. Yet the erection even of this frail memorial reflects the higheſt honour on the ſympathetic feelings of Burns *.

Upon one ſide of the ſtone he cauſed the following epitaph of his own compoſition to be engraven:

No ſculptur'd marble here, nor pompous lay!
No ſtoried urn, nor animated buſt!
This ſimple ſtone directs pale Scotia's way,
To pour her ſorrows o'er her poet's duſt.

The other ſide bears this inſcription:

By ſpecial grant of the Managers
To ROBERT BURNS, who erected this ſtone,
This burial place is ever to remain ſacred to the memory of
ROBERT FERGUSSON.

* In relating the incidents of our poet's life in Edinburgh, we ought to have mentioned the ſentiments of reſpect and ſympathy with which he traced out the grave of his predeceſſor Fergusſon, over whoſe aſhes in the Canongate church-yard he obtained leave to erect an humble monument, which will be viewed by reflecting minds with no common intereſt, and which will awake in the boſom of kindred genius many a high emotion.

CURRIE's Life of Burns.

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His death was not unlamented by his poetical contemporaries: various elegiac compoſitions made their appearance on the occaſion. One of theſe, written by Mr Tait, author of the *Cave of Morar*, is commonly appended to his works.

Nor had his merit been overlooked during his life. Two panegyrical epiſtles addreſſed to him, were publiſhed in the *Weekly Magazine*; one of which, together with the anſwer to it, is alſo to be found among his poems.

Of his poetical works many editions have appeared ſince his death: no fewer than three were lately publiſhed in the courſe of about twelve months. But the taſk of editing them in a proper manner is yet to perform. Burns has received due honours from Dr Currie, Ramſay from Mr Chalmers and his co-adjutor; and an edition of Roſs may ſoon be expected from a gentleman of profound erudition. When ſuch a taſte for Scotiſh literature prevails, it is to be hoped that Ferguſſon will ſpeedily appear in a more reſpectable form. His poems have always been careleſsly arranged, and, for the moſt part;

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printed in a mean and flovenly manner. A few explanatory and biographical notes are alſo wanting.

With regard to Fergusſon's perſon, he was of the middle ſtature, and of a ſomewhat ſlender form. His countenance, which in other reſpects had a ſlight tendency towards effeminacy, was rendered highly animated by the expreſſion of his large black eyes. In his addreſs he was genteel, and free from affectation.

From the portrait generally affixed to his works, the reader can derive no idea of his external appearance: it is entirely ſuppoſititious. The picture of himſelf which he mentions in his *Codicil* cannot now be found.

Of his general character it will here be unneceſſary to enter into any formal diſcuſſion. The ſum of what can now be known reſpecting his conduct through life, has already been laid before the reader.

He has thus been characteriſed by one of the correſpondents of Burns: "While I recollect with plea-

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ſure his extraordinary talents and many amiable qualities, it affords me the greateſt conſolation, that I am honoured with the correſpondence of his ſucceſſor in national ſimplicity and genius. That Mr Burns has refined in the art of poetry, muſt readily be admitted; but notwithſtanding many favourable repreſentations, I am yet to learn that he inherits his convivial powers.

"There was ſuch a richneſs of converſation, ſuch a plenitude of fancy and attraction in him, that when I call the happy period of our intercourſe to my memory, I feel myſelf in a ſtate of delirium. I was then younger than *him* by eight or ten years, but his manner was ſo felicitous, that he enraptured every perſon around him, and infuſed into the hearts of the young and old, the ſpirit and animation which operated on his own mind *."

Gentleneſs and humanity of diſpoſition he poſſeſſed in an eminent degree. The impulſe of benevolence frequently prompted him to beſtow his laſt

* Currie's Burns, vol. ii. p. 259.

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farthing on thoſe who ſolicited his charity. His ſurviving relations retain a pleaſing remembrance of his dutiful behaviour towards his parents; and the tender regard with which his memory is ſtill cheriſhed by his numerous acquaintance fully demonſtrates his value as a friend. Till his diſſipated manner of life had in a great meaſure eradicated all ſenſe of delicacy or propriety, he always ſhowed himſelf poſſeſt of a manly ſpirit of independence. Let it be recorded to his honour, that he never diſgraced his Muſe with the ſervile ſtrain of panegyric: he flattered no illiterate peer, nor ſacrificed his ſincerity in order to advance his intereſt.

It cannot, however, be concealed that his virtues were tainted with glaring imperfections. He was an utter ſtranger to temperance and ſobriety, without which no character can be propoſed as an example worthy of imitation. Yet over his frailties let humanity drop a tear: let his virtues only be remembered, and his vices permitted to ſink into oblivion. He on whom has devolved the taſk of relating his melancholy fate, has not ſought to exhibit him as the victim of imprudence, from an unge-

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nerous deſire of exulting over his untimely grave, but from a real ſolicitude that early genius and worth may avoid the paths which lead to inevitable deſtruction.

He had two ſiſters, Barbara and Margaret, both of whom are ſtill living in Edinburgh. The former is married to Mr Inverarity, cabinet-maker, Canal Street, the latter to Mr Duvall, a purſer in the royal navy. His elder brother, Henry, a man of ſome learning and ingenuity, has already been mentioned. He is the author of a treatiſe on the art of fencing; a ſubject of which he poſſeſſed much practical knowledge. Of the time and manner of his death his relations are entirely ignorant. He had been bound an apprentice to a tradeſman in Edinburgh, but being led aſtray by vicious company, was under the neceſſity of entering on board a man of war. In one of his letters to his brother we find the following admonitions: "If you want either to ſucceed or gain eſteem, be very careful of what company you keep. This advice I hope you will take, as it comes from one who has loſt himſelf merely through inattention in that reſpect.—I hope you will make it your particular care

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care to ſtudy ſuch branches of education as may prove moſt conducive to your happineſs; and appear at leaſt once every ſunday in church."

THE learning and genius of Fergusſon form the next ſubject of inquiry.

His mode of life was unfavourable to the acquiſition of general literature. He was wont to expreſs the moſt ſovereign contempt for the ſpeculations of logic, metaphyſics, and mathematics; a ſtrong preſumption that he was but ſlightly acquainted with them. Poets ſeldom poſſeſs any reliſh for the abſtract ſciences. They delight to expatiate in the boundleſs regions of fiction, not to contemplate objects of pure intellection: Gray, who is regarded as a man of very extenſive learning, was almoſt entirely ignorant of pure mathematics, and the ſtudies dependent on that ſcience *.

* Maſon's Life of Gray, ſect. v.

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In ancient literature we cannot reaſonably ſuppoſe him to have been very deeply ſkilled; though it is ſufficiently evident that he was no ſtranger to the beauties of Latin poetry.

The writings of ſeveral claſſical Engliſh poets he appears to have ſtudied with a ſufficient degree of attention. But, as Mr Pinkerton has juſtly obſerved, his acquaintance with Scotiſh poetry was by no means extenſive *.

The deficiences of art were amply ſupplied by the bounty of nature: he inherited the ſenſibility and fancy of a poet. His works, however, are of very unequal merit; ſome of them excellent, ſome even below mediocrity. It is in the compoſition of his Scotiſh poems that we muſt expect to find his efforts moſt ſucceſsful. To ſuch of his pieces as are written in Engliſh very little praiſe is due. In ſome of them indeed it is eaſy to diſcover marks of genius; but the greater part appear deficient in every quality which tends to intereſt and captivate the mind.

* Pinkerton's Liſt of the Scotiſh Poets.

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They are neither diſtinguiſhed by originality of thought, nor by ſuperior harmony of verſification.

Towards paſtoral poetry he diſcovers the uſual partiality of a juvenile writer; but his attempts in this department are far from being ſucceſsful. Of his eclogues the numbers are ſufficiently ſmooth, but the ſentiment trite and common. Many paſſages are tautological and childiſh; and, in general, the reader meets with nothing that delights his fancy or intereſts his feelings.

There is ſomething in the nature of paſtoral poetry which ſeems in a great meaſure to preclude all hopes of ſucceeding in that ſpecies of compoſition. The life of a ſhepherd admits of ſo little variety, and has ſo frequently afforded materials to the poets of every nation, that the ſubject is now found to be completely exhauſted. Whenever a ſhepherd is introduced in a modern eclogue, we anticipate the train of his diſcourſe, as ſoon as we are acquainted with his particular ſituation. Nothing can be more monotonous and inſipid than the generality of ſuch productions.

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Some poets, aware of theſe circumſtances, have introduced an entire change of perſons and of ſcenery, and conſequently have originated a new ſpecies of poetry. From their eclogues ſhepherds are utterly excluded, and fiſherman are admitted in order to ſupply their place. The piſcatory eclogues of Sannazarius, Parthenius, and P. Fletcher, are ſufficiently known to the general reader. Sannazarius was the firſt author who compoſed a ſeries of poems on this model; though the original notion ſeems to have been borrowed from the twenty-firſt idyl of Theocritus.

Of the *Expedition to Fife*, the *Epiſtle to a Friend*, and his other poems of the ſame claſs, nothing very favourable can be ſaid. The application of blank verſe to trivial or ludicrous ſubjects has ſeldom been found to ſucceed. The *Splendid Shilling* of Philips is almoſt the only work of this deſcription that can afford pleaſure in the peruſal. Beſides the important advantage of an original deſign, it poſſeſſes a kind of quaint dignity peculiar to itſelf.

Philips was the model which he propoſed to imi-

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tate; but his verſification bears a ſtronger reſemblance to that of Trapp or Roſcommon *. The cadence of his verſes is commonly the ſame with that of the rhyming couplet. This obſervation will be verified by the following lines:

From noiſy buſtle, from contention free,
Far from the buſy town I careleſs loll,
Not like ſwain Tityrus or the bards of old,
Under a beechen venerable ſhade,
But on a furzy heath where blooming broom
And thorny whins the ſpacious plains adorn.
Here health ſits ſmiling on my youthful brow;
For ere the ſun, &c.

Nothing can be more fatiguing to the ear than

* Trapp's Tranſlation of Virgil; Roſcommon's Tranſlation of Horace's Art of Poetry.

The latter of theſe works has been highly commended by a late writer. "His eſſay on tranſlated verſe, (ſays he), and his tranſlation of Horace's Art of Poetry, have much merit."

WALPOLE's Royal and Noble Authors, vol. ii. p. 249.

It will perhaps be difficult to diſcover wherein the merit of this tranſlation conſiſts: to the majority of readers it appears moſt frigid and unpoetical. Though the noble critic pretends to great delicacy of taſte, his deciſions in queſtions of literature are commonly pronounced at random. For the reputation which has hitherto

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ſuch verſes as theſe: the ſtructure of the firſt of every two lines naturally induces us to expect a correſpondent rhyme at the cloſe of the next; but as this expectation is always diſappointed, we are filled with languor and diſguſt.

His *Verſes written at the Hermitage of Braid* have been pronounced "inferior in beautiful deſcription, and elegant verſification, to none in any language." This hyperbolical praiſe, however, muſt not be received without certain limitations. They are not devoid of poetical merit, but will ſcarcely be found entitled to unqualified commendation.

His *Laſt Will* and the *Codicil* may be ranked among the beſt of his Engliſh poems. Though very far from being correct, they are ſprightly and hu-

attached itſelf to his name, he is in a great meaſure indebted to his elevated rank in ſociety: but now that he ſleeps in the peaceful vault of his anceſtors, his productions will be weighed in a juſter balance. The frivolous and unfeeling Earl of Orford is now a plebeian in the republic of letters. After his flimſy writings have long been conſigned to the ſhelf of oblivion, his ungenerous treatment of Chatterton will ſtand recorded in the page of biography.

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morous. Like Butler and Swift, he has frequently introduced double rhymes; which commonly pleaſe from their being unexpected.

The *Epilogue ſpoken by Mr Wilſon* likewiſe riſes above mediocrity. The aſſumed character of an *Edinburgh Buck* is very happily ſupported. In ſuch ludicrous productions, however, every attempt to ſport with ſerious and awful ideas, ought ſedulouſly to be avoided.

> Now had they borrowed Argus' eyes who ſaw us;
> All was made dark and deſolate as chaos:
> Lamps tumbled after lamps, and loſt their luſtres,
> *Like doomſday, when the ſtars ſhall fall in cluſters.*

This paſſage is highly reprehenſible.

In deſcribing the horror, the ſilence, and the ſolemnity of night, ſeveral poets have vied with each other *. The *Night-piece* of Ferguſſon, which has

* Apollonii Argonaut. lib iii. v. 744; Virgilii Æneid. lib. iv. v. 522; Dryden's Indian Emperor, act iii. ſc. ii; Lee's Theodoſius, act v. ſc. ii.

Of theſe well-known paſſages the three laſt probably derive

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never been inſerted among his works, is a poem of ſome merit:

Now murky ſhades ſurround the pole;
Darkneſs lords without controul;
To the notes of buzzing owl,
Lions roar, and tygers howl,
Fright'ning from their azure ſhrine,
Stars that wont in orbs to ſhine.
Now the ſailor's ſtorm-toſt bark
Knows no bleſt celeſtial mark;
While in the briny troubl'd deep,
Dolphins change their ſport for ſleep.
Ghoſts and frightful ſpectres gaunt
Church-yards dreary footſteps haunt,
And bruſh with wither'd arms the dews
That fall upon the drooping yews.

In poems profeſſedly Engliſh, he very frequently adopts phraſes peculiar to the Scotiſh dialect; an

their origin from the firſt. To the ſame ſource we may trace the following deſcription:

Adſpice, cuncta ſilent; orcas et maxima cete
Somnus habet; tacitæ recubant per littora phocæ.
Non Zephyri ſtrepit aura; ſopor ſuper humida mulcet
Æquora: ſopito connivent ſidera cœlo
Solus ego, hei miſero! dum triſti pectore quæſtus
Nocte itero, ſomnum tota de mente fugavi,
Nec tamen ulla meæ tangit te cura ſalutis.

SANNAZAR. Eclog. ii. v. 17.

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error into which more correct writers have occasionally been betrayed. It is extremely difficult for a native of this part of the iſland to exclude Scoticiſms entirely from his compoſitions.

From the preceding remarks it will appear that Ferguſſon is ſcarcely entitled to the rank of a claſſical Engliſh poet. Whether a continued effort might have rendered him worthy of this diſtinction, it is unneceſſary to inquire. That which is performed, preſents itſelf to general obſervation; what might have been performed, is involved in much obſcurity.

In the moſt inſipid of his productions, paſſages of evident beauty will be diſcovered. Thus, in the poem *Againſt Repining at Fortune*, the following ſtanzas appear like a ſolitary roſe in the middle of a deſolated garden:

Can he who with the tide of fortune ſails,
More pleaſures from the ſweets of nature ſhare?
Do Zephyrs waft him more ambroſial gales,
Or do his groves a gayer liv'ry wear?

To me the heav'ns unveil as pure a ſky;
To me the flow'rs as rich a bloom diſcloſe;
The morning beams as radiant to my eye,
And darkneſs guides me to as ſweet repoſe.

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But his reputation reſts almoſt ſolely upon the merit of his Scotiſh compoſitions. He is to be ranked, not with Pennecuik and other writers of the ſame claſs, but with Ramſay, Roſs, Burns, and Macneill. Though his mind was leſs comprehenſive than that of Burns, and though he is in ſome meaſure a ſtranger to the delicacy and ſenſibility which characteriſe the beautiful productions of Macneill, yet in all the eſſential qualities which conſtitute a poet, he is equal if not ſuperior to Ramſay and Roſs.

The popularity of his Scotiſh poems is a ſtrong proof of their intrinſic merit. In that part of the iſland where their beauties can be properly underſtood and reliſhed, few productions of a ſimilar deſcription have been ſo univerſally admired. They are read by people of every denomination; and their native charms are ſuch, that they cannot be read without delight. They exhibit a ſprightfulneſs of thought and facility of expreſſion which has ſeldom or never been ſurpaſſed. The verſification is ſo eaſy and natural, that it ſeems to flow ſpontaneouſly, and without any kind of effort in the poet. It is always ſmooth, and on ſome occaſions highly

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melodious. In *Hame Content*, in particular, the cadence of the verſe cannot fail to delight the ear. Though his ſubjects are frequently trivial, yet he never becomes flat or inſipid: every thing that occurs is lively and entertaining. To thoſe who affirm that his ſentiments are ſeldom natural, the term *nature* certainly cannot be ſuppoſed to convey the ſame ſignification as it does to the reſt of mankind *. If nature preſide not here, where ſhall ſhe be found?

The language of thoſe modern Scotiſh poets

* *Nature* is a term which, by philoſophers as well as by critics, has perhaps been uſed in a more vague manner than any other. I ſhall produce a ſolitary inſtance: "Cumque homini ſive natura ſive quis deus nihil mente præſtabilius dediſſet, huic divino muneri ac dono nihil eſſe tam inimicum, quam voluptatem."

CICERO. de Senectute.

Here the word *nature* can only ſignify the fixed and eternal laws of the univerſe as they act in a ſubordination to the Deity; though a diſtinction is apparently made between nature and his agency. In this extended ſenſe, nature is in fact the continued agency of God upon the works of creation.

In the various writings of Hobbes this word is often applied in the ſame vague and indefinite manner. When an author wiſhes to unfold an abſurd ſyſtem, nothing can be more convenient than ſuch incorrect phraſeology.

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whom we regard as claſſical, is eſſentially different. In this they have been chiefly regulated by local ſituation. That of Macneill and Burns makes the neareſt approach towards the purity of Engliſh; from which that of Roſs is fartheſt removed. The poems of the latter, as well as thoſe of the ingenious R. Forbes, are compoſed in the provincial tongue of Buchan; which is to be conſidered as the Scoto-Pictiſh dialect interſperſed with a certain number of Engliſh words.

In the Scotiſh pieces of Ferguſſon the dialect peculiar to the inhabitants of Edinburgh and its immediate environs chiefly prevails. His phraſeology differs from that of Ramſay, who intermingles the idiom of the metropolis and of his native province.

Of his ſerious compoſitions ſeveral poſſeſs diſtinguiſhed merit. The odes, addreſſed to the bee, and to the *gowdſpink*, are no contemptible ſpecimens of Scotiſh lyric poetry. They contain a due mixture of picturesque deſcription and well-turned moral reflection; and the verſification often poſſeſſes much ſuavity.

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The *Elegy on the Death of Scots Muſic* will afford moſt pleaſure upon a ſlight peruſal. On ſuch a ſubject a more poetical effuſion might reaſonably have been expected. In a manner ſomewhat ſimilar to Lovibond in his *Tears of Old May-Day*, he introduces an imaginary perſonage, and bewails her hapleſs fate. The perſonification, however, is not ſtrictly preſerved.

O Scotland! that could ance afford
To bang the pith o' Roman ſword,
Winna your ſons, wi' joint accord,
To battle ſpeed,
And fight till Muſic be reſtor'd,
Whilk now lies dead?

In the fifth of theſe verſes muſic is to be regarded as an art, and in the laſt as a nymph or goddeſs.

The *Farmer's Ingle* is, according to a very judicious critic, the beſt of his productions. Of its manifeſt beauties Burns ſeems to have been fully aware; as it undoubtedly ſuggeſted to him the ſubject of his *Cotter's Saturday Night*. Each of theſe poems claims our decided approbation. The merit of an original

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deſign reſts with Fergusſon; but the praiſe of exciting the higheſt degree of intereſt is due to Burns. The characters of the perſons whom he introduces are more ſtrongly marked, and his incidents are more varied and ſtriking.

The principal charm of theſe rural poems ariſes from the ſkilful manner in which incidents, in themſelves ſimple or perhaps trivial, are preſented to the mind. They offer to our contemplation a pleaſing picture of innocence and induſtry; qualities which we cannot fail to approve in others, even though we do not chance to poſſeſs them ourſelves. However vicious and depraved a man may be, he generally retains ſome reliſh for artleſs ſimplicity, whether he trace it in real life, or only in the deſcriptions of the the poets. To this propenſity of our nature, ſuch poems as that which we have been examining addreſs themſelves in a very forcible manner.

Fergusſon, like the generality of Scotiſhmen, felt an enthuſiaſtic love of his country. In the *Farmer's Ingle* he ſeizes an opportunity of expreſſing his patriotic ſentiments:

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On ſicken food has mony a doughty deed
By Caledonia's anceſtors been done;
By this did mony a wight fu' weirlike bleed
In brulzies frae the dawn to ſet o' ſun;
'Twas this that brac'd their gardies, ſtiff an' ſtrang,
That bent the deadly yew in ancient days,
Laid Denmark's daring ſons in yird alang,
Gard Scottiſh thriftles bang the Roman bays:
For near our creſts their heads they doughtna raiſe.

Hallow Fair is a humourous poem of very conſiderable merit. It diſplays in a happy manner the ſcenes of noiſy and riotous mirth in which a relaxation from labour is ſo apt to engage the lower ranks of ſociety. The juſtneſs of the obſervation conveyed in the concluding ſtanza the poet had, it may be preſumed, frequent occaſion to experience:

A wee ſoup drink does unco weel
To had the heart aboon;
It's gude as lang's a canny chiel
Can ſtand ſteeve in his ſhoon:
But gin a birky's owr weel ſaird,
It gars him aften ſtammer
To pleys that bring him to the guard,
An' eke the council-chaumer,
Wi' ſhame that day.

His rooted antipathy to the city-guard inclines

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us to ſuſpect that he frequently expoſed himſelf to their vengeance.

His poem entitled *Leith Races* is of the ſame claſs, but of ſuperior ingenuity. The initial ſtanzas are picturesque and beautiful. He commences in the following manner:

In July month, ae bonny morn,
Whan Nature's rokelay green
Was ſpread o'er ilka rigg o' corn
To charm our roving e'en;
Glouring about I ſaw a quean,
The faireſt 'neath the lift;
Her een were o' the ſiller ſheen,
Her ſkin like ſnawy drift,
Sae white that day.

The nymph having addreſſed him, he thus rejoins:

And wha are ye, my winſome dear,
That takes the gate ſae early?
Whare do ye win, gin ane may ſpear?
For I right mickle ſerly,
That ſic braw buſkit laughing laſs
Thir bonny blinks ſhould gie,
An' loup like Hebe o'er the graſs,
As wanton and as free
Frae dule this day.

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This very engaging perſonage proves to be no other than Mirth; and in a moſt cordial manner they agree to proceed to the race-ground. He ſeems, however, to have treated the *laughing laſs* with no great politeneſs: after having thus made her appearance, ſhe is never again preſented to our view. Expectation is excited, without being gratified.

The *Holy Fair* of Burns is liable to the very ſame objection. And indeed the one production is evidently an antitype of the other. The exordium of the *Holy Fair* is as follows:

Upon a ſimmer ſunday morn,
When Nature's face is fair,
I walked forth to view the corn,
An' ſnuff the caller air.
The riſing ſun owre Galſton muirs,
Wi' glorious light was glintin;
The hares were hirplin down the furs,
The lav'rocks they were chantin
Fu' ſweet that day.

As lightſomely I glowr'd abroad,
To ſee a ſcene ſae gay,
Three hizzies, early at the road,
Cam ſkelpin up the way;

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Twa had manteeles o' dolefu' black,
But ane wi' lyart lining;
The third, that gaed a wee a-back,
Was in the faſhion ſhining,
Fu' gay that day.

Leith Races, the *Holy Fair*, and ſeveral other productions of the ſame authors, are compoſed in the meaſure in which Ramſay, the moſt unfaithful of all editors, has thought proper to exhibit *Chriſtis Kirk of the Grene*. In the more genuine editions of that admirable poem, the awkward and unmeaning cloſe of *that day* is not added to every ſtanza. This practice is unknown to the more ancient of our poets. The example of Ramſay, however, has been injudiciouſly followed by ſome of his moſt eminent ſucceſſors.

Ferguſſon has not, like Montague, Erſkine, and Jenner, preſented us with a ſeries of poetical eſſays under the title of *Town-Eclogues*; but in lively deſcriptions of a town-life much of his merit will be found to conſiſt. *Auld Reikie*, the longeſt as well as one of the beſt of his productions, is a profeſt delineation of thoſe incidents, cuſtoms, and manners,

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which, to a certain extent, are introduced into almoſt all his humourous poems in the Scotiſh dialect. It exhibits the general characteriſtics of his more ſucceſsful efforts. The ſerious is blended with the gay, in ſuch a manner as to render the effect of the whole extremely ludicrous. It diſplays much acuteneſs of obſervation, and the happieſt powers of humourous deſcription. In the compoſition of his poems, he ſeems almoſt invariably to have proceeded without any regard to method. The plan of *Auld Reikie*, however, makes ſome approaches towards regularity.

Caller Oyſters, *Caller Water*, *Braid Claith*, the *Daft Days*, and the *King's Birth-Day in Edinburgh*, are pieces of humour which have always been read with much pleaſure. The latter of theſe contains the following very riſible invocation:

O Muſe! be kind, an' dinna faſh us,
To flee awa beyont Parnaſſus,
Nor ſeek for Helicon to waſh us,
That heath'niſh ſpring;
Wi' Highland whiſky ſcour our hawſes,
An' gar us ſing.

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Begin then, dame, ye've drunk your fill;
You woudna hae the tither gill?
You'll truſt me, mair would do you ill,
An' ding you doited:
Troth, 'twould be ſair againſt my will
To hae the wyte o't.

Paſtoral poetry, ſo little cultivated among the ancients *, has attracted the utmoſt regard from the moderns. Fergusſon has preſented us with Scotiſh

* Theocritus, Bion, and Moſchus,, among the Greeks, and Virgil, Nemeſian, and Calpurnius, among the Romans, are the only paſtoral poets with whoſe works we are acquainted Of theſe the two laſt have never obtained any conſiderable degree of celebrity. Yet their writings do not ſeem devoid of merit. Though much inferior to thoſe of the other poets now mentioned, their eclogues may be peruſed with pleaſure. The following paſſage of the latter has always appeared to me to poſſeſs no common beauty:

Te ſine, vae miſero! mihi lilia nigra videntur,
Pallenteſque roſæ, nec dulce rubens hyacinthus,
Nullos nec myrtus, nec laurus ſpirat odores.
At tu ſi venias, et candida lilia fient,
Purpureæque roſæ, et dulce rubens hyacinthus,
Tum mihi cum myrto laurus ſpirabit odores.
NEMESIAN. Eclog. ii. v. 44.

A fine turn of expreſſion, ſimilar to this, occurs in Milton's *Paradiſe Loſt, book* iv. v. 641. and in Maſon's *Muſæus*, v. 175.

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as well as with Engliſh eclogues; and his ſucceſs is nearly the ſame in both attempts.

The paſtorals of Relph, written in the Cumberland dialect, afford room for ſuppoſing that Scotiſh bucolics might be rendered highly agreeable and intereſting. A Britiſh poet may avail himſelf of the Scotiſh, with the ſame propriety as the Greeks availed themſelves of the Doric phraſeology.

It is remarkable that Ferguſſon, though peculiarly diſtinguiſhed for the harmony of his voice and the delicacy of his ear, has never paid any ſerious attention to ſong-writing. His eſſays in this ſpecies of compoſition are ſlight and few; but it appears highly probable that due exertion might have conducted him to eminence. According to the juſt obſervation of an excellent anonymous writer, the ſong "is one of thoſe mental exertions, that require not ſo much ſuperiority either of genius, or of poetic fancy, as a certain native addreſs: ſo, in the intercourſe of life, there is an elegance of manner, which pleaſes independently either of worth or ability." *

* Remarks on the Writings of Ramſay.

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When we conſider the circumſtances in which he was placed, it will not appear ſurpriſing that his poems exhibit frequent inſtances of inaccuracy of thought, and incorrectneſs of expreſſion. The importance of reconſideration, however he might forget it in practice, he was always ready to admit in theory. He was fully aware that poetical reputation is a plant of tardy growth, and cannot be reared without much labour and care. According to one of his intimate friends, he often quoted the well-known lines of Waller, in which poets are reminded of the neceſſity of correcting their works. But as buſineſs and diſſipation left him a very ſmall portion of ſtudious leiſure, we find many of his poems in a ſomewhat rude dreſs.

A diſagreeable effect is produced by his promiſcuous uſe of the pronoun *thou* and its plural *you*. Scarcely a ſingle page of his works is free from this blemiſh.

Many other faults might without difficulty be pointed out; but his compoſitions ought always to be treated with a certain degree of lenity. To ap-

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ply the rigour of criticiſm to the unpremeditated effuſions of ſuch an author, would evince more literary zeal than good-nature.

Carminis incompti tenuem lecture libellum,
Pone ſupercilium.
Seria contractis expende poemata rugis:
Nos Thymelen ſequimur.

AUSONIUS.

Upon a general ſurvey of Ferguſſon's poetical efforts, it will appear that he poſſeſſed an uncommon quickneſs of conception and facility of expreſſion. His compoſitions are the offspring of fancy rather than of imagination. Though they do not diſplay thoſe high powers of invention which characterize the works of vigourous genius, they yet exhibit ſuch a ſprightly vein of poetry as will always recommend itſelf to the lovers of gaiety, humour, and Doric ſimplicity.

He inherited from nature a ſtrong ſenſe of the ridiculous. His talents for delineating humourous and ludicrous ſcenes has very rarely been exceeded. In his deſcriptions of the various objects and occur-

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rences connected with the metropolis of Scotland, he appears to the utmoſt advantage. Many circumſtances which by a common obſerver would paſs unregarded, he has preſented to the mind in a novel and highly agreeable manner. His ſubjects are often local and temporary; but in his hands they become generally intereſting: the obſtructions which circumſtance ſeems to have interpoſed, are completely removed by the ſucceſsful exertions of his ingenuity.

The candid deciſion of the amiable and accompliſhed biographer of Burns muſt not here be withheld. "Though Fergusſon had higher powers of imagination than Ramſay, his genius was not of the higheſt order; nor did his learning, which was conſiderable, improve his genius. His poems, written in pure Engliſh, in which he often follows claſſical models, though ſuperior to the Engliſh poems of Ramſay, ſeldom riſe above mediocrity; but in thoſe compoſed in the Scottiſh dialect he is often very ſucceſsful. He was in general, however, leſs happy than Ramſay in the ſubjects of his muſe. As he ſpent the greater part of his life in Edinburgh, and wrote for his amuſement in the intervals of

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buſineſs or diſſipation, his Scottiſh poems are chiefly founded on the incidents of a town-life, which, though they are ſuſceptible of humour, do not admit of thoſe delineations of ſcenery and manners, which vivify the rural poetry of Ramſay, and which ſo agreeably amuſe the fancy and intereſt the heart. The town-eclogues of Ferguſſon, if we may ſo denominate them, are however faithful to nature, and often diſtinguiſhed by a very happy vein of humour. His poems entitled, *The Daft Days*, *The King's Birth-day in Edinburgh*, *Leith Races*, and *The Hallow Fair*, will juſtify this character. In theſe, particularly in the laſt, he imitated *Chriſtis Kirk of the Grene*, as Ramſay had done before him. His Addreſs to the *Tron-Kirk Bell* is an exquiſite piece of humour, which Burns has ſcarcely excelled. In appreciating the genius of Ferguſſon, it ought to be recollected, that his poems are the careleſs effuſions of an irregular though amiable young man, who wrote for the periodical papers of the day, and who died in early youth. Had his life been prolonged under happier circumſtances of fortune, he would probably haven riſen to much higher reputation. He might have excelled

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in rural poetry; for though his profeſſed paſtorals on the eſtabliſhed Sicilian model, are ſtale and unintereſting, *The Farmer's Ingle*, which may be conſidered as a Scottiſh paſtoral, is the happieſt of all his productions *."

* Currie's Life of Burns.

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THE

LIFE

OF

WILLIAM FALCONER.

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THE

LIFE

OF

WILLIAM FALCONER.

THE publication of Dr Anderſon's *Life of Falconer* has, by promoting inquiry, led to the gradual diſcovery of ſeveral additional particulars relative to this ingenious poet. The degree of celebrity which he acquired as the author of the *Shipwreck*, fully authoriſes the preſent attempt to combine all the biographical materials which induſtry has enabled me to collect.

For ſome of the anecdotes contained in the following pages, the reader is indebted to the literary zeal of

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Mrs Profeſſor Dalzel, and of Mr Falconer, the learned editor of the *Periplus* of Hanno. This gentleman, though unrelated to the nautical poet, has not been indifferent with regard to his life and writings.

William Falconer was born at Edinburgh, about the year 1735. His father, after having for many years followed the occupation of a barber and wig-maker in the Netherbow, was unfortunately reduced to a ſtate of inſolvency. The contributions of his friends afterwards enabled him to open a grocer's ſhop: but he was either a man of mean capacity or of an indolent diſpoſition; for upon his being deprived, by the death of his wife, of a prudent and active coadjutor, his affairs were again deranged. The greater part of his life ſeems to have been ſpent in extreme indigence.

His ſon was educated at the private ſchool of Mr Webſter, a teacher of little reputation. The period of his attendance and the extent of his progreſs cannot now be aſcertained; but from the poverty of his parents, we may ſafely conclude, that he was

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ſoon releaſed from the reſtraint of ſcholaſtic diſcipline.

Genius is a hardy plant of irregular growth: it ſometimes ſprouts with the ſuddenneſs of the hawthorn, and ſometimes riſes with the ſlow gradation of the oak. In his earlier years Falconer exhibited no marks of unuſual capacity, but, on the contrary, was generally regarded as a youth of unpromiſing parts. The intellectual faculties of ſeveral other men who at length roſe to literary eminence, were equally ſlow in their progreſs towards maturity. It would appear, therefore, that from the degree of facility with which a boy performs his ſcholaſtic exerciſes, we cannot always form a correct eſtimate of his future attainments.

At an early period of life, the misfortunes of his family compelled him to abandon his native country, and to enter himſelf as a ſailor in the royal navy. While he continued in this ſtation he is ſaid to have attracted the notice of Mr Campbell, the author of *Lexiphanes*, who was purſer of the ſhip to which he belonged. It is farther ſtated, that Camp-

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bell entertained him as his ſervant, and delighted in communicating to him what knowledge he himſelf poſſeſſed *.

The profeſſion which powerful neceſſity had led him to embrace, was by no means congenial to his temper of mind. Of his own ſevere deſtiny he ſpeaks in a very intereſting manner:

While yet a ſtripling, oft' with fond alarms,
His boſom danc'd to nature's boundleſs charms;
On him fair ſcience dawn'd in happier hour,
Awakening into bloom young fancy's flower;
But frowning fortune, with untimely blaſt,
The bloſſom wither'd, and the dawn o'ercaſt.
Forlorn of heart, and by ſevere decree
Condemn'd reluctant to the faithleſs ſea,
With long farewel he left the laurel grove,
Where ſcience and the tuneful ſiſters rove.

* Currie's Burns, vol. ii. p. 289.

Dr Currie received this information from a ſurgeon of a man of war, who was perſonally acquainted with both Falconer and Campbell. It muſt not, however, be implicitly received. What the ſame gentleman communicated reſpecting Falconer's birth, and the place of his nativity, is altogether erroneous. This palpable inaccuracy will incline us to view the whole account with a ſuſpicious eye. Yet Dr Currie is by no means to be charged with precipitate credulity: the ſurgeon whoſe authority he quotes, undoubtedly related the anecdotes in a manner which left no room ſuſpect the authenticity of his information.

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Though this boiſterous profeſſion may in too many inſtances tend to blunt the ſofter feelings of humanity, yet it cannot be ſuppoſed to effect a complete aſſimilation of character in thoſe by whom it is exerciſed. The poetical mind of Falconer, it is to be preſumed, was untainted by the ſurrounding contagion. The conſtancy of intellectual exertion might preſerve his faculties in a ſtate of uninterrupted ſalubrity; as the ſea is prevented, by its perpetual motion, from falling into putreſcency and ſtagnation.

Upon reviſiting Edinburgh in the year 1751, he publiſhed a poem *Sacred to the Memory of his Royal Highneſs Frederick Prince of Wales.*

In the eighteenth year of his age we find him wandering about the port of Alexandria. Here he was engaged as ſecond mate of the Britannia, a merchantman bound for Venice. While they proceeded on their voyage, a dreadful ſtorm aroſe; and at length the veſſel ſtruck upon a rock near Cape Colonna on the coaſt of Greece. Of the ſhip's company, Falconer and other two were the only indi-

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viduals who had the good fortune to reach the ſhore.

This melancholy event forms the ſubject of his celebrated poem entitled the *Shipwreck*; which was publiſhed in 1762, and dedicated to Edward Duke of York, one of the brothers of his preſent Majeſty.

The hands which had been employed in adjuſting the braces of a ſhip, were not found unſkilful in the management of the golden plectrum. His native genius roſe ſuperior to the untoward circumſtances incident to his ſtation; and the poem was immediately regarded as a production of ſingular merit. Such an unprecedented union of poetical ingenuity with nautical ſcience, could not poſſibly meet with a cold reception.

During the life of the author it underwent ſeveral editions, the laſt of which varied conſiderably from the firſt: but, as a very judicious and rational critic has obſerved, "it may reaſonably be doubted, whether it has been improved in the ſame proportion as it has been lengthened. There is frequently a

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copious ſimplicity in firſt deſigns, that no after-thought or labour can amend; an irregular beauty that every alteration muſt efface. In lengthening works, an author is apt to fall into repetitions, or to increaſe the number of words, without adding to the number or energy of the thoughts *."

During this year his ſong entitled the *Fond Lover* appeared in the *St James's Magazine* for the month of October.

After the publication of the *Shipwreck*, he paid a final viſit to Scotland. He reſided for ſome time at the manſe of Gladſmuir, which was then poſſeſſed by his illuſtrious kinſman Dr Robertſon. This great hiſtorian, whoſe father was the couſin-german of old Falconer, ſeems to have been proud to acknowledge his relation to the ingenious ſelf-taught poet.

The patronage of the prince to whom he had inſcribed his work, procured him the purſer ſhip of the Royal George, a firſt-rate man of war. His

* Anderſon's Life of Falconer.

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gratitude for this inſtance of royal favour prompted him to compoſe an *Ode on the Duke of York's Second Departure from England as Rear-Admiral.* Towards the concluſion of the poem, he thus addreſſes his benefactor:

No happy ſon of wealth or fame
To court a royal patron came:
A hapleſs youth, whoſe vital page
Was one ſad lengthen'd tale of woe,
Where ruthleſs fate, impelling tides of rage,
Bade wave on wave in dire ſucceſſion flow;
To glittering ſtars, and titled names unknown,
Preferr'd his ſuit to thee alone.
The tale your ſacred pity mov'd;
You felt, conſented, and approv'd.

In 1766 he publiſhed the *Demagogue* under the aſſumed name of Theophilus Thorn. This is a political ſatire directed againſt a certain party whom he regards in the light of incendiaries. Among other zealous partizans, he aſſails the virulent Churchill, a writer of verſes who once enjoyed a reputation which his uncouth ſtrains were by no means adequate to ſupport.

The evident intention of this ſatire was to court

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the favour of adminiſtration. It is probable that his political zeal was not totally unrewarded. The advertiſement to an edition of the *Shipwreck*, publiſhed in the laſt year of his life, is dated from Sommerſet Houſe; a circumſtance which affords room for conjecturing that he at that time was in poſſeſſion of ſome ſituation in the navy pay-office. The truth of this ſuppoſition may perhaps be aſcertained at ſome future period.

In 1769, he publiſhed the *Marine Dictionary*, a work of the utmoſt utility to the ſtudents of naval tactics. His chequered life was now advancing towards a cloſe. In the courſe of the ſame year, the reſtleſs ſpirit of adventure impelled him to embark on board the Aurora, with a view of ſettling in the Eaſt-Indies. She arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in the month of December, and, after a ſhort interval, again proceeded on her voyage, but never reached the deſired port *. The veſſel, together with its ill-fated crew, is ſuppoſed to have periſhed by fire or ſtorm.

* Bell's Fugitive Poetry, vol. xv. p. 157.

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His untimely death left his widow in a ſtate little removed from indigence. The relations of Mrs Falconer, whoſe maiden name was Hicks, had been averſe from her forming a matrimonial connection with a Scotiſh adventurer, and were never completely reconciled to her after her marriage. From them, therefore, ſhe derived little, or perhaps no aſſiſtance. In conſideration of the rapid ſale of the *Marine Dictionary*, Mr Cadell, bookſeller in London, preſented her, from time to time, with liberal pecuniary preſents. Her other reſources are not accurately known. Having never born any children, ſhe was fortunately unincumbered with the cares of a family. She died at Bath a few years ago.

He had a brother and a ſiſter, both of whom were born deaf and dumb. The ſiſter is ſtill living in this city: ſhe is a conſtant reſidentiary in the Royal Infirmary.

In reviewing the ſhorter productions of Falconer, we ſhall find little ſcope for critical inveſtigation.

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They cannot pretend to any particular marks of distinction; and unless his fame had rested upon a more solid basis, it must very speedily have decayed.

His *Fond Lover* and *Address to Miranda* are songs not devoid of merit. The latter of them, which was first published in the *Edinburgh Magazine and Review* in the year 1773, has been commended by a writer intimately acquainted with this species of composition *.

In the elegiac poem *Sacred to the Memory of Frederick Prince of Wales*, it is scarcely possible to discover even the faintest glimmerings of that genius which he afterwards displayed. Occasionally, indeed, we meet with a few tolerable verses; but these only appear like the scattered flowers which sometimes bloom amid the sterile plains of Arabia. Towards the close there occurs the most ludicrous simile that ever disgraced the serious page of any author. The rising fame of the young prince he compares to the curling volumes of sable smoke which

* Ritson's Essay on Scotish Song.

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mount in the atmoſphere and blacken all the ſky! This is apt to remind us of Butler's comparing the changing of the morning from black to red, to the effect produced by the boiling of a lobſter *.

The *Ode on the Duke of York's Second Departure from England*, is of that ſpecies of writing which ſome have thought proper to denominate the Pindaric. Every author poſſeſſes an indiſputable right to impoſe upon his own productions whatever name he chuſes: but ſuch rude maſſes of verſe as generally compoſe theſe odes, bear no more reſemblance to *the pointed ſhafts* of Pindar, than Simmias's *Hatchet* or *Shepherd's Pipe* to the *Iliad* of Homer †.

* Butler's Hudibras, part ii. canto ii. v. 29.

† The mode of writing here alluded to was introduced by Cowley, a poet of no mean genius, but of an extremely vitiated taſte. The unmerited reputation which he acquired by the publication of his *Pindariques*, indueed many other poets to follow his example. Congreve claims the honour of having firſt pointed out the abſurdity of ſuch crude and irregular efforts. Beſides unfolding, in a *Diſcourſe on the Pindarique Ode*, the true ſpirit of this higher ſpecies of lyric poetry, he alſo diſplayed, in ſeveral of his own productions, the regularity with which Pindar arranged his ſtanzas. It may however be remarked that he was not the firſt Engliſh poet who exhibited this ſpecies of compoſition in its

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If Falconer's genius does not appear to have been peculiarly adapted for lyric poetry, this ode muſt at leaſt be regarded as an expreſſion of his lively ſenſe of gratitude. The epiſode of the choice of Hercules is introduced with propriety, and poſſeſſes ſome beauty. The ſame incidents have been embelliſhed by Shenſtone and Lowth; but it is probable that no poetical imitation will ever rival the proſe relation in which the original notion is to be found *.

The *Demagogue*, which bears internal evidence of haſty compoſition, contains many inſtances of incorrectneſs and inelegance. The ſatire, however, is ſometimes manly and poignant; though it occaſionally verges towards ſcurrility.

genuine form. Among the works of Jonſon we find an ode ſtrictly modelled after the example of Pindar. In imitation of the Greek στροφή, ἀντιστροφή, and ἐπῳδός, he has introduced *turns*, *counter-turns*, and *ſtands*. Of its poetical merit the following couplet may ſerve as a ſpecimen;

Alas, but Moriſon fell young;
He never fell; thou fall'ſt, my tongue!

* Xenophon. Memorabil. lib. ii. cap. i.

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As the *Shipwreck* is a performance which the public has always been accuſtomed to regard with a favourable eye, its peculiar excellencies and defects demand a more ample diſplay. The uniform popularity which it has maintained, may be adduced as a pretty ſtrong proof of its intrinſic merit. Various cauſes may tend to confer a ſhort-lived reputation upon poets of inferior genius; but that reputation, which does not reſt upon a true foundation, will very ſpeedily decay. The ſcrutinizing impartiality of mankind muſt at length diſplay itſelf, and diſſolve the fabric of unreal grandeur; as the returning ſun diſſolves thoſe mountains of ice which the froſt of a Greenland night has formed. Sheffield, Montague, and Granville, were once extolled as the legitimate ſons of Apollo; but indignant time has erazed their names from the rolls of fame.

The fate of a merchant-ſhip loſt in a violent ſtorm, will, at firſt view, appear to be a ſubject little ſuſceptible of embelliſhment. But when we begin to peruſe the pages of Falconer, every prejudice of this

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kind immediately vaniſhes. They diſplay a pathetic ſimplicity which cannot fail to reach the heart.

In exhibiting a ſeries of events which can ſcarcely be deemed of a poetical kind, he has diſcovered no common ingenuity. To relate ſimple and unadorned facts in their natural order, is not the buſineſs of a poet: he muſt ſelect thoſe that ſeem moſt conducive to the general purpoſe which he has in view, and blend them with incidents which are purely imaginary, in ſuch a manner that the whole may become intereſting, and aſſume an air of probability. To this rule the author of the *Shipwreck* has certainly conformed.

Though not inattentive to the mechaniſm of poetry, his excellencies are by no means the reſult of painful and unwearied application: they are the happy effuſions of a vigorous imagination, and a heart true to the warm impreſſions of nature. The manner in which he has conducted his ſimple narrative, cannot fail to excite emotions of genuine ſympathy. To his power of moving the paſſions,

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a tribute of due reſpect has lately been paid by a poet of real genius:

> Thy woes, Arion! and thy ſimple tale,
> O'er all the heart ſhall triumph and prevail.
>
> CAMPBELL.

Few writers can aſpire to a ſtation on *the mountain of ſublimity* *. If Falconer ſeldom reaches the ſublime, he has for the moſt part carefully avoided the mean and vulgar.

The *Shipwreck* is a narrative poem of conſiderable length: it will therefore be proper to inveſtigate its general plan.

After having propoſed the ſubject, and invoked the Muſes, he apologizes for his undertaking, and proceeds to introduce a beautiful allegorical deſcription of memory. He ſupplicates that power to recall to his view the events which he is about to relate. The narrative then commences. The ſhip Britannia is repreſented as proceeding on her intended voyage between Alexandria and Venice. Upon the

* A. Thomſon's Paradiſe of Taſte, canto vi.

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occaſion of her touching at the iſland of Candia, the poet finds an opportunity of lamenting the devaſtations of war, and of expatiating on the miſeries of ſlavery.

He next delineates the characters of Albert, Rodmond, Palemon, and Arion, the chief perſonages who make their appearance in the ſequel of the poem. Here he diſplays conſiderable powers of diſcrimination. The portrait of Rodmond, in particular, is drawn with a maſterly hand. In alluſion to the danger which Arion is reported to have ſo narrowly eſcaped, he introduces himſelf, in a very intereſting manner, under the borrowed name of that ancient poet and muſician *.

To theſe delineations of character ſucceeds the beautiful epiſode of Palemon and Anna, two lovers

* Καὶ μέν τις Λίσβοιο παλαίτατον ἔργον ἀοιδῆς
Ἐκλυεν ὡς δελφῖνος ὀχησάμενος περὶ νάστοις,
Κῦμα μέλαν περάασκε παθάμενος ἄτρομος, αἰεὶ
Λείβων. καὶ πότμον ὑπέκφυγε λῃϊζήρων,
Τειναρίῃτ' ἐπίλασσεν ἐπὶ προβολῆσι Λακώνων.
OPPIAN. Halieutic. lib. v. v. 448.

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whom the cruelty of a ſordid parent had plunged into the depth of miſery.

The ſhip ſets ſail from Candia; and the natives of the iſland aſſemble along the ſhore in order to view her as "ſhe marches on the ſeas," and to contemplate the various devices which ornament her ſtern and prow.

A ſeries of pathetic reflections on bidding adieu to the land forms the exordium of the ſecond canto. In that part of the narrative which immediately follows, a variety of ſtriking objects are deſcribed; the brilliant hues reflected from the ſides of a dying dolphin; the water-ſpout whoſe towering column mingles with the ſkies; and the gambols of a ſhoal of porpoiſes which are ſeen exploring their prophetic courſe along the ocean.

A dreadful ſtorm now threatens to approach. As its violence increaſes, the pilots are apprehenſive of fatal conſequences, and hold a conſultation reſpecting the meaſures to be adopted. The mariners are at length ready to ſink under the ſevere exertions

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which they are under the neceſſity of uſing, in order to prevent the veſſel from foundering.

The third canto commences with a diſſertation on the deſign and influence of poetry. He then reſumes his principal ſubject; but very ſoon finds an opportunity of entering into a long digreſſion relative to the ſtate of ancient and modern Greece. After he has thus indulged his fancy, our wandering thoughts are again recalled to the condition of the ſhattered veſſel. She at length ſtrikes upon a rock and is daſhed in pieces. The greater part of the crew periſh in the wreck; and Arion himſelf experiences a very narrow eſcape.

> Another billow burſts in boundleſs roar;
> Arion ſinks, and memory views no more!
> Ha! total night, and horror here preſide;
> My ſtunn'd ear tingles to the whizzing tide:
> It is the funeral knell! and, gliding near,
> Methinks the phantoms of the dead appear!

At laſt he emerges from the deep, and, with only two of his companions, gains the ſhore. An affecting picture of the fate of Palemon occurs towards the concluſion.

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Such are the outlines of the *Shipwreck*, a poem of no ordinary merit. The moſt material objection which can be urged againſt its general conſtruction, is, that at the very time that the ſtorm is precipitating the veſſel towards deſtruction, the poet makes a long excurſion into the adjacent nations. We regard him, not as a cool ſpectator, but as a principal actor in the intereſting ſcene which is preſented to our view. At ſuch an important criſis it was therefore injudicious to introduce a long digreſſion of any deſcription. To a claſſical ear the name of ANCIENT GREECE conveys a magic ſound: yet the mind of him who ſtands on the pinnacle of danger, muſt be too much abſorbed by ideas of a different kind, to leave any room for the admiſſion of claſſical raptures. The manner in which he has treated the ſubject, will ſcarcely be regarded as a ſufficient compenſation for ſuch a breach of propriety: he performs much leſs than his readers might expect on ſuch an occaſion.

Upon the whole, however, the poem is conducted with taſte and judgement. Although he is ſometimes too circumſtantial in the detail of nautical ma-

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nœuvres, yet we follow him through the various gradations of the fable with a lively intereſt. The introduction of numberleſs pleaſing and pathetic incidents prevents attention from languiſhing.

The only regular epiſode is that of Palemon and Anna. A more tender and beautiful ſtory Engliſh poetry has not often exhibited. The diſtreſs of the two lovers is pourtrayed with a moſt delicate hand. His delineation of Palemon's ſenſations when he falls in love, would not have diſgraced the pencil of the much-injured Apollonius.

In relating the mournful fate of Palemon, he diſplays no inconſiderable ſkill. Upon the foundering of the veſſel, the unhappy youth having betaken himſelf to a raft, endeavours to reach the ſhore. We are left to ſuppoſe that he is immediately overwhelmed by the fury of the ſtorm. Arion and two of the mariners having eſcaped the general wreck, begin to ſearch for an adventurous youth whom they had formerly perceived approaching towards the land:

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Panting, with eyes averted from the day,
Prone, helpleſs, on the tangly beach he lay—
It is Palemon!

Hope and fear thus alternately gain the aſcendency in our mind, till at laſt our hopes are baniſhed and our fears realized. The bruiſes which he had received when caſt on ſhore by the breakers, put a ſpeedy period to his exiſtence.

The ſentiments of the poem are commonly adopted with propriety. The moſt remarkable deviation from the language of nature occurs in the final ſpeech of Palemon. After having addreſſed his beloved friend Arion in very affecting terms, he proceeds in the following manner:

When thou ſome tale of hapleſs love ſhalt hear,
That ſteals from pity's eye the melting tear,
Of two chaſte hearts by mutual paſſion join'd,
To abſence, ſorrow, and deſpair conſign'd,
Oh! then, to ſwell the tides of ſocial woe,
That heal th' afflicted boſom they o'erflow,
While memory dictates, this ſad ſhipwreck tell,
And what diſtreſs thy wretched friend befel!

Theſe lines are ſufficiently beautiful, but their

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beauty is misplaced. Such sentiments can never be uttered by any man who finds himself in a situation similar to that of Palemon. In order to take a survey of this kind, the mind must be free from every painful emotion, and entirely divested of the influence of every stronger passion.

As Falconer attempted a subject in a great measure "new to epic lore," he had no proper models to follow. The *Halieutics* of Oppian and of Parthenius, had he been acquainted with them, could not have furnished him with any important ideas. Though these are likewise poets of the ocean, yet their object differs essentially from his. The only performance which seems to bear any resemblance to that which we have been examining, is the *Sea-Piece* of Kirkpatrick. This work was published twelve years before the *Shipwreck:* but the one is by no means to be regarded as the prototype of the other. That Falconer ever perused the *Sea-Piece*, does not appear from any internal evidence.

In a poem of five cantos, Kirkpatrick relates the

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voyage of the ſhip Eliza from Belfaſt to Bermudas; but as, in her progreſs, no very important incident occurs, the attention of the reader is not kept awake by means of a continued narrative. We meet with little more than a ſeries of mere digreſſions, many of which are injudicious and unſeaſonable. There is ſuch an unceaſing parade of chymical knowledge, and ſuch a ſtrange mixture of ſerioufneſs with buffoonry, that it is hardly poſſible to conceive any thing more groteſque and heterogeneous. Had his judgement been equal to his fancy, much might have been effected. But his poetry is incorrect and unclaſſical. Though we occaſionally diſcover ſtriking paſſages, yet he often ſinks below contempt. To Falconer he is in every reſpect inferior.

Both poets have attempted to expreſs the ſentiments which ariſe in the breaſt of the voyager when he bids adieu to land. In order to place them in the field of competition, it may not be improper to produce the reſpective paſſages which contain theſe reflections.

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Adieu, ye plenteous, hoſpitable vales,
Ye ſcenes of rural mirth, and monkiſh tales;
Your taintleſs ſoil, and temp'rate air I ſhun,
To prove the fervours of a loftier ſun;
Where thinner graſs muſt cloath the with'ring glade,
And deadly ſnakes infeſt the woodland ſhade.
Such penſive forms, that all my fancy throng,
Suſpend the wand'ring poet's liquid ſong;
Hopeleſs to chear the Barro with a lay,
His native ſtream, where ſpringing ſalmon play.

KIRKPATRICK.

Adieu, ye pleaſures of the rural ſcene,
Where peace and calm contentment dwell ſerene!
To me in vain, on earth's prolific ſoil,
With ſummer crown'd, th' Elyſian vallies ſmile!
To me thoſe happier ſcenes no joy impart,
But tantalize with hope my aching heart.
For, theſe, alas! reluctant I forego,
To viſit ſtorms and elements of woe!
Ye tempeſts! o'er my head congenial roll,
To ſuit the mournful muſic of my ſoul!
In black progreſſion, lo! they hover near;
Hail, ſocial horrors, like my fate ſevere!
Old ocean, hail, beneath whoſe azure zone
The ſecret deep lies unexplor'd, unknown!

FALCONER.

It will be almoſt unneceſſary to remark, that the latter of theſe paſſages is infinitely ſuperior to the former.

The verſification of the *Shipwreck*, though not

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always very correct, poſſeſſes conſiderable beauty. It is for the moſt part ſpirited and vigorous; and we are not unfrequently preſented with happy turns of expreſſion.

Among the principal faults of the poem may be reckoned the unceaſing recurrence of the barbarous phraſeology of ſeamen. The nature of his ſubject rendered it abſolutely neceſſary to introduce a number of uncouth terms incident to navigation: but it will be difficult to aſſign any adequate reaſon, why in the uſe of them he has been ſo extremely liberal. Such jargon is but ill calculated for enhancing the value of a poem. It muſt at the ſame time be admitted, that in reducing nautical terms to the ſmoothneſs of verſe he has been wonderfully ſucceſsful.

In the management of his compariſons he ſeldom diſcovers any high degree of ſkill. They occur too frequently; and it but rarely happens that the analogy is ſteadily purſued. Compariſons are introduced for the ſake of placing ſome object in a more conſpicuous point of view; and unleſs they contribute to this end, they are only to be regarded as uſeleſs appendages or falſe ornaments. Many of

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Falconer's ſimilies neither tend to illuſtrate nor to embelliſh: they derive their origin from objects too contiguous or too remote; and conſequently fail to produce the deſired effect. Yet others are of a different deſcription. The following compariſon ſeems to approach towards ſublimity:

> Like ſome ſtrong watch-tower nodding o'er the deep,
> Whoſe rocky baſe the foaming waters ſweep,
> Untam'd he ſtood.

In the poems of Falconer it is not eaſy to diſcover any material veſtiges of imitation. They ſometimes contain paſſages which apparently correſpond with others in Milton, Shakeſpeare, Gray, and Pope: but to affirm that ſuch coincidences are never accidental, would betray a precipitancy of judgement *.

* In the preſent age it is cuſtomary to charge almoſt every author with plagiariſm. A taſte for hunting parallel paſſages was never ſo prevalent. This employment may be amuſive, but it is often very frivolous.

The ſubject of ſecondary imitation has been treated in a maſterly manner by Dr Hurd. In Warton's *Eſſay on Pope*, and in Farmer's *Eſſay on the Learning of Shakeſpeare*, many important hints will alſo be found. Various inſtances of plagiariſm and imitation have been pointed out by Johnſon, *Rambler*, *No.* 143. Warton, *Adventurer*, *No.* 63. and by Roberts, *Looker-on*, *No.* 40.

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THE

LIFE

OF

WILLIAM RUSSELL, LL. D.

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ACCORDING to the opinion of Dr Johnſon, "nobody can write the life of a man, but thoſe who have eat and drunk and lived in a ſocial intercourſe with him *." In this view of the ſubject, as well as in many others, I find myſelf altogether unqualified for the preſent undertaking. But as the taſk has been declined by thoſe who poſſeſs every opportunity of performing it in the moſt intereſting manner, public curioſity muſt for ever remain ungratified, unleſs the ſubject be attempted by ſome one who writes not from perſonal knowledge, but from ſuch fugitive information as the recollection of

* Boſwell's Life of Johnſon, vol. ii. p. 163.

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others is able to ſupply. Information of this kind has been obtained from Dr Ruſſell's near relations and moſt intimate friends: yet the biographer who procures his materials even in this way, muſt labour under ſeveral diſadvantages. The nice diſcriminations of character, and the almoſt imperceptible ſhades of the mind, he cannot unfold with any high degree of accuracy.

William Ruſſell, the eldeſt ſon of Alexander Ruſſell and Chriſtian Ballantyne, was born in the year 1746, at Windydoors, a farm-houſe in the county of Mid-Lothian. At a proper age he was ſent to the ſchool of Inverleithen, where he acquired a very ſlender knowledge of the Latin and Greek languages.

In 1756 he was removed to Edinburgh, in order to be inſtructed in writing and arithmetic. Having ſtudied theſe uſeful branches of education for about ten months, he was bound apprentice to the bookſelling and printing buſineſs for five years.

While engaged in this occupation, he diſcovered the utmoſt ardour in literary purſuits. He ſeems to

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have delighted his fancy with the hopes of future eminence; to have been ſedulous in the acquiſition of thoſe ſtores of intellectual wealth which beſtow celebrity on the poſſeſſor. The early and unchanging deſire of honourable diſtinction muſt be regarded as an infallible criterion of no vulgar or groveling mind. This deſire is often kindled in the midſt of untoward circumſtances, and remains unextinguiſhed during the courſe of a life marked by the ſevereſt calamities.

The occupation which Ruſſell had choſen, was not altogether unfavourable to the acquiſition of knowledge. Printers and bookſellers have often raiſed themſelves to eminence in the republic of letters. In proof of this aſſertion, it will be unneceſſary to ſearch the literary annals of foreign nations: the names of Ruddiman, Richardſon, Dodſley, Bowyer, and Smellie, ought always to be mentioned with commendation. Yet as his part of the buſineſs was merely mechanical, his attainments even at this early period cannot but be regarded as highly reſpectable. His learning was not acquired in ſchools and colleges, but in the obſcurity of undirected ſtudy. And this circumſtance ought

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always to be kept in view, as we proceed in theſe memoirs of his life and writings.

When he had finiſhed his apprenticeſhip, he publiſhed a *Collection of Modern Poems*, which ſeems to have attracted ſome notice at the time of its appearance. The ſelection was conſidered as judicious. It included ſeveral of the productions of Gray and Shenſtone, the beauties of whoſe poetry he had the good taſte to perceive before many of his countrymen. He claims the honour of having contributed to extend their popularity in the northern part of the iſland. The ſublime odes of Gray excited his higheſt admiration: he was accuſtomed to recite them in a wild and enthuſiaſtic manner.

In 1763, while employed as a journeyman-printer, he became a member of the Miſcellaneous Society, a private literary inſtitution which was chiefly under the direction of Mr Dalzel and Mr Liſton. It was compoſed of collegians and other young men eagerly engaged in the purſuit of knowledge. From inſtitutions of this deſcription, the juvenile inquirer may perhaps derive ſome advantage: but in general they are fruitful nurſe-

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ries of every thing that is pompouſly ridiculous. The members often ſolicit admiſſion at too early a period of life; and from a habit of haranguing upon ſubjects which they have never inveſtigated, are led to entertain an over-weening conceit of their own limited attainments. Vanity and ignorance form a union by which nothing laudable can be produced. Their operation reſembles the tilting of a balance: the one ſcale is never at reſt while the other continues in motion.

About this period he made an attempt to adapt Crebillon's *Rhadamiſthe et Zenobie* to the Britiſh ſtage. The manuſcript was ſubmitted to the inſpection of Mr Dalzel and Mr Liſton; who, after a very careful peruſal, offered ſeveral objections to particular paſſages. He was not one of thoſe who never aſk advice till they have determined not to follow it: of the critical hints ſuggeſted by theſe gentlemen, he ſhowed ſufficient promptitude to avail himſelf. This tragedy was at length offered to the manager of the Drury-Lane theatre; but as Murphy's *Zenobia* was at that time in rehearſal, it was deemed imprudent to accept of another play on the ſame ſubject.

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Next year he iſſued propoſals for publiſhing a ſecond volume of his *Collection of Modern Poems*, and retired to the country in order to arrange the materials. During his abſence from Edinburgh, he maintained an epiſtolary correſpondence with Lord Elibank, Miſs Scott of Benham, Mr Dalzel, and Dr Ogilvie; to whoſe friendſhip his youthful ingenuity had recommended him. The projected volume never made its appearance.

In 1765, Lord Elibank having invited him to his ſeat in Eaſt-Lothian, he there ſpent the greater part of the autumn, and had an opportunity of converſing with many eminent men. To this nobleman he ſeems to have looked for favour and protection. In the hope of obtaining preferment through his influence, he had relinquiſhed the drudgery of his original employment, and now proſecuted his ſtudies on the banks of Tweed. Hiſtory and polite literature engaged his chief attention.

Having reſided with his father till the month of May 1767, he ſet out for London, in order to await the turns of fortune. Young men of a ſanguine

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disposition are apt to imagine, that as soon as they find themselves within the walls of the metropolis, a mighty load of preferment will be heaped upon their shoulders. An indefinite and confused idea of honour and riches presents itself to their mind: and, without reflecting on the means by which these are obtained, they readily persuade themselves that their own merit, whether real or fancied, will immediately be acknowledged and rewarded. The experience of a few months commonly serves to correct the extravagance of their views. They at length discover, that in the superb capital of one of the most opulent and powerful of nations, every individual is not destined to partake of the sweets of honourable preferment. They find that even there riches and honours do not fall like manna in the wilderness, and invite the willing hand of every Israelite who in the morning issues from his tent.

Russell's towering hopes were soon blasted. After waiting in vain for promotion through the influence of Mr Hume, Lord Elibank, General Murray, and Governor Johnstone, he was under the necessity of

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engaging himself as a corrector to the press of William Strahan, afterwards his Majesty's printer. To find himself thus placed in a situation so inadequate to his expectations, and so unworthy of his abilities, must have shed a temporary gloom over his mind. It does not, however, appear that he afterwards reprobated the conduct of any of these his reputed patrons. In some hasty memorandums found among his papers after his death, he acknowledges that he expected preferment through their interest, but never affirms that his expectations were founded upon their promises. Those who aspire to distinction, should, in the first place, ask themselves for what particular employment they seem qualified, and whether the individuals whom they are disposed to regard in the light of patrons, have, at any time, actually encouraged them to rely upon their protection. This rational mode of precedure would prevent innumerable scenes of disappointment and mortification.

In 1769, he quitted Mr Strahan's, and was employed as overseer to the printing-office of Brown and Adlard. During the same year he published an *Ode to Fortitude*; which was immediately reprinted

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at Edinburgh by his former maſters, Martin and Wotherſpoon.

His *Sentimental Tales* appeared in 1770. From this time he wrote many eſſays in proſe and verſe for the monthly publications.

In 1772, he publiſhed a collection of *Fables Moral and Sentimental*, and an *Eſſay on the Character, Manners, and Genius of Women, from the French of M. Thomas.*

The preciſe time when he relinquiſhed his employment in the printing-office, I have not been able to diſcover; but from the number of his productions, it may be inferred that about this period he had entirely devoted himſelf to the purſuits of literature.

The profeſſional author is a character which has often been treated with unmerited ridicule and contempt, eſpecially by thoſe men of letters whom fortune has placed above the neceſſity of writing for a mere ſubſiſtence. It muſt indeed be confeſſed that writers

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by profeſſion have frequently proſtituted their talents: but this circumſtance is not ſufficient to affix a ſtigma on the whole claſs. Many individuals among them have invariably maintained that noble independence of mind which adds dignity to every ſtation of life. The petulant and illiberal ſarcaſms ſo often aimed at their poverty, recoil back upon thoſe who have uttered them. Poverty implies nothing diſgraceful. The goods of fortune are not univerſally beſtowed in proportion to the merit of the individual. And, as Salluſt the Cynic has juſtly obſerved, it ought not to excite our wonder, that the wicked often enjoy all the comforts which the preſent life affords, while the only hopes that remain for the good are thoſe which center in futurity. Riches are deſpiſed by the latter; while by the former they are regarded as the ſole foundation of happineſs *. Although poverty is no criterion of moral turpitude, yet as it is generally accompanied with real evils, we cannot ſufficiently regret, that it ſhould ever have been the portion of thoſe who, by contributing to the pleaſure and inſtruction of mankind,

* Salluſt. de Diis et Mundo, cap. ix.

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have endeavoured to tranſmit their names with honour to poſterity *.

Rouſſeau was of opinion that no man ought to devote himſelf to literature as a profeſſion: and, for his own part, he choſe rather to be employed in copying muſic at the rate of a ſhilling per ſheet. But thoſe who regulate their conduct by ſuch principles, ſeem to place the honour and dignity of literature upon an imaginary baſis.

Julia, a Poetical Romance, made its appearance in the year 1774. "A poetical romance (he obſerves), or a poem conducted by letters, is a ſpecies of compoſition hitherto unattempted. But the author of the following piece would rather reſt his claim to ſucceſs upon the propriety, than the novelty of his plan.

* See a long catalogue of unfortunate authors in D'Iſraeli's *Curioſities of Literature*, *vol.* i. *p.* 29.—A writer of acknowledged ingenuity and learning has too juſtly obſerved, "that genius, like beauty, may be ruinous to thoſe who poſſeſs it; and that literature, like virtue, muſt ſometimes be its own reward."

DYER's Diſſertation on Benevolence, chap. ii.

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" Modern life is allowed to want dignity for the epopée: there are many intereſting ſubjects too extenſive or too familiar for tragedy; and there are many ſtories too pathetic for proſe. To ſupply theſe defects, the poetical romance ſeems well calculated †."

In this quotation a poetical romance is conſidered as ſynonymous with a poem conducted by letters. Between theſe, however, there is no neceſſary connection. Chaucer's *Squieres Tale*, though not exhibited in an epiſtolary form, is a poetical romance; and Drayton's *England's Heroical Epiſtles*, though no poetical romance, conſtitute a metrical work in which the various characters introduced expreſs their ſentiments by means of epiſtolary correſpondence. The epiſtles of Horace and of Boileau were never miſtaken for romances. This proper diſtinction being eſtabliſhed, Ruſſell will not be found entitled to the honour which he here ſeems diſpoſed to claim. Who has not heard of *Amadis de Gaula*, and the other redoubtable knights of the ſame order? Poetical romances are to be numbered among the earlieſt li-

† Preface to Julia.

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terary efforts of modern Europe. From the age of Lobeira to that of Spencer, they maintained a very high rank in the ſcale of public favour †.

That any incident is too pathetic to be related in proſe, is a poſition which can by no means be admitted. The admirable works of Oſſian, as tranſlated by Macpherſon, are of themſelves ſufficient to eſtabliſh a very different concluſion.

Neither the plan nor the execution of this poetical romance can be commended. The *Bath Guide* of Anſtey may be peruſed with pleaſure; but from a ſerious compoſition, conſtructed, like Ruſſell's *Julia*, upon a ſomewhat ſimilar model, we turn with ſentiments of diſguſt. For every thing valuable which the work contains, he is indebted to the *Nouvelle Heloiſe* of Rouſſeau. The man who challenges a compariſon with this writer, muſt entertain no humble opinion of his own intellectual endowments.

† Spencer's *Faery Queen* is to be regarded as a poetical romance, rather than an epic poem.

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He was afterwards engaged in compoſing the *Hiſtory of America*, which was publiſhed in numbers, and completed in 1779. Of all his productions this is perhaps entitled to the higheſt praiſe. It was favourably received by the public, and ſeems to have laid the foundation of his fame. That no ſecond edition has hitherto appeared, may undoubtedly be attributed to the admirable manner in which the ſame ſubject has been treated by an author of eſtabliſhed reputation. Had Robertſon's *Hiſtory of America* never been written, that of Ruſſell would have obtained greater popularity.

In the courſe of the ſame year, he alſo publiſhed the two firſt volumes of his *Hiſtory of Modern Europe*. The notice which they attracted, exceeded his moſt ſanguine expectations.

About this time he was a frequent contributor to the various Magazines then in circulation. His occaſional poems inſerted in theſe publications would form a volume of conſiderable ſize. His friends have no occaſion to regret that the collection of his poetical works, which he had long meditated, never made its

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appearance: it would have diminiſhed rather than increaſed his reputation. In the eſtimate of his own literary merits he diſſented from the general voice. His hiſtorical works, which have met with a very favourable reception, he regarded as greatly inferior to his poetical works, which have been totally neglected.

Goldſmith ſometimes declared that his own poetical career commenced at too late an æra of Engliſh literature *. If this obſervation be juſt, in reference to the time when he wrote, it muſt apply more forcibly to the poets of a ſubſequent period. It muſt indeed be admitted that the acquiſition of fame will be difficult in proportion to the number of candidates: but poets of real genius will always ſecure admiration, notwithſtanding the high reputation of their predeceſſors and contemporaries.—Are we to ſuppoſe that nothing now remains unperformed? During the two laſt centuries, the art of Engliſh poetry has received many important improvements; but it may yet be advanced to a ſtate of higher perfection. If any thing remains to do, it may perhaps be done. Let

* Boſwell's Life of Johnſon, vol. ii. p. 364.

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us never despair of human genius: we know what has been effected, but cannot foretel what the faculties of man may yet effect.

Russell's failure in the attempt to advance his reputation by means of his poetical effusions, did not proceed from the lateness of the period when he lived, but from intrinsic circumstances. They are the productions of a man who, from admiring a captivating art, proceeded to unsuccessful imitation. To the study of poetry he could not be attracted by motives of interest; for, in the present age, the dullest compiler often receives a higher compensation than the most ingenious poet. With metrical works the venders of literature are liberally supplied by ladies and gentlemen who stand more in need of reputation than of money. The adventurous youth who regards this department of literature as the road to affluence, as well as to fame, will probably have an early opportunity of convincing himself that he has adopted erroneous notions.

Frange, puer, calamos, et inanes defere Musas,
Et potius glandes rubicundaque collige corna;
Duc ad mulctra greges, et lac venale per urbem

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Non tacitus porta; quid enim tibi fistula reddat,
Quo tutere famem?

CALPURNIUS.

During the following year his ſtudies met with a temporary interruption: he embarked for Jamaica in order to recover ſome money due to him as the heir of his brother James, who, after a reſidence of ſeveral years, had died in that iſland.

In 1783, he publiſhed the *Tragic Muſe*, a poem addreſſed to Mrs Siddons. By this ſtep he probably intended to ſecure the theatrical intereſt of that admirable actreſs.

To addreſs verſes to a player has been thought derogatory from the dignity of the literary character. It would be a crime, ſays a periodical writer, to ſacrifice genius on ſuch an unintereſting occaſion: we have more dignified ſubjects for the poetic Muſe than an individual whoſe excellence is only a dazzling meteor, and muſt be forgotten in a few years at moſt.

That poets may diſcover a more dignified ſubject.

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for panegyric than the merits of the moſt eminent actor, will not be controverted. It does not, however, follow as a neceſſary conſequence, that theatrical merit ſhould never be celebrated. Supreme excellence in any profeſſion ought to be reſcued from oblivion: and the various ingredients which enter into the compoſition of an accompliſhed actor, are of no vulgar kind. "Pity it is (exclaims Cibber) that the momentary beauties flowing from an harmonious elocution, cannot, like thoſe of poetry, be their own reward! that the animated graces of the player can live no longer than the inſtant breath and motion that preſents them; or at beſt can but faintly glimmer through the memory, or imperfect recollection of a few ſurviving ſpectators *!"

When a poet addreſſes an actor in the language of abject adulation, he expoſes himſelf to the ſevereſt cenſure†; but in exhibiting a juſt delineation of hiſtri-

* Cibber's Apology for his Life, chap. iv.

† In a poem addreſſed to Garrick by W. Whitehead, the following verſes occur:

A nation's taſte depends on you,
Perhaps a nation's virtue too.

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onic excellence, he renders himself obnoxious to no merited reprehension.

The three volumes which complete the *History of Modern Europe*, made their appearance in 1784. From his own memorandums, it appears that in the composition of each volume of this work he consumed about twelve months; a space of time which affords no room for surprise at his rapidity or tardiness of performance. The eleven volumes of Smollett's *History of England* were finished in fourteen months †: the twelve volumes of Gibbon's *History*

It is difficult to determine which of these lines is most absurd. When Foote conceived the design of exhibiting on the stage a ridiculous imitation of the Stratford Jubilee, he resolved to convert this hyperbolical compliment into burlesque. "In this mock procession, a fellow was to be dressed up, and made as like Mr Garrick as possible. It was intended that some ragamuffian in the procession should address Roscius in the well-known lines of the laureat,

A nation's taste depends on you,
Perhaps a nation's virtue too.

The representer of Mr Garrick was to make no answer, but to cry "Cock a doodle do!"

DAVIES's Life of Garrick, vol. ii. chap. xlvii.

† Anderson's Life of Smollett.

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of the Roman Empire were the conſtant labour of twenty of the beſt years of the author's life *.

Ruſſell ſeems about this time to have been in eaſy circumſtances. During the three following years we do not find him engaged in any new literary ſcheme. He occaſionally occupied himſelf in correcting and enlarging the *Hiſtory of Modern Europe.*

Concerning his ſocial habits while he continued to reſide in London, no ſatisfactory intelligence has been obtained. Like every one who devotes the moſt precious of his hours to ſtudy, he muſt have been eager in cultivating an intimacy with men diſtinguiſhed by their ingenuity and learning. Among his literary acquaintances he numbered Dr Stuart, a man whoſe genius it would be ſuperfluous to praiſe, and whoſe frailties it would be painful to expoſe: though his moral character may probably have been as odious as a late writer has repreſented it †, yet his intellectual endowments were ſuch as cannot fail to extort admiration. To find ſo much energy of

* Gibbon's Memoirs of his Life and Writings.

† Chalmers's Life of Ruddiman, p. 290.

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mind united to ſo much depravity, muſt inſpire us with melancholy reflections on the imbecillity of human nature. The dreams of philoſophical empirics are not yet realiſed: man ſtill continues in a ſtate far removed from perfection;

> His knowledge ſo confined,
> So vain his wiſhes, and ſo weak his mind,
> His ſoul a bright obſcurity at beſt,
> And rough with tempeſts his afflicted breaſt,
> His life a flower, ere evening ſure to fade,
> His higheſt joys the ſhadow of a ſhade.
>
> JONES's Palace of Fortune.

In 1787, he formed a matrimonial connection with Miſs Scott; in whom he found a lady of feminine accompliſhments, and of a maſculine underſtanding. She became the partner of his ſtudies and the ſoother of his cares.

He now fixed his reſidence at Knottyholm, a farm belonging to the Duke of Buccleugh, and ſituated at a ſmall diſtance from the town of Langholm. If he poſſeſt the ſmalleſt reliſh for a rural life, his ſituation muſt have been highly agreeable. His literary labours had not been unſucceſsful. He was united

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to an excellent woman for whom he had long entertained the moſt cordial affection and eſteem. They tenanted a commodious and elegant cottage on the banks of the Eſk, a river not "unknown in ſong." The adjacent country affords an infinite variety of romantic ſcenes, ſuch as a poet might delight to feign. It was here that Armſtrong and Mickle began to liſten to the whiſpers of fancy, and to ſtore their minds with the images and ſentiments of genuine poetry. He reſided in a diſtrict not unpoliſhed nor illiterate. The elegant ſociety which he enjoyed at Forge, the reſidence of the late James Scott, Eſq. muſt have preſented many charms to a man of letters. He alſo lived in habits of intimacy with ſeveral of the neighbouring clergy, and with Mr Maxwell of Broomholm, the author of a late *Eſſay on Tune*.

In 1792, he obtained from the univerſity of St Andrew's the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws. Diplomas have often been conferred with leſs diſcrimination.

Encouraged by the favourable reception of his laſt publication, he had begun to digeſt the *Hiſtory of*

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Ancient Europe; two volumes of which appeared in the courſe of the following year. In the compoſition of this work, he profeſſes to have been peculiarly ſtudious to found his facts on original authorities, and to clear the narration of unimportant events. In order to render the book more valuable, he has alſo included the revolutions in Aſia and Africa; and has thus conſtituted it, in ſome meaſure, a complete hiſtory of the early ages of the world.

This work was leſs favourably received: but the period was now approaching when to him applauſe and cenſure were to be alike indifferent. A ſtroke of the palſy ſuddenly terminated his exiſtence. He died in the forty-ſeventh year of his age, and was interred in Weſterkirk church-yard.

His widow continues to reſide at Knottyholm. She has always been highly reſpected by the circle of her acquaintance. His daughter is a promiſing girl of about twelve years of age.

The *Hiſtory of Ancient Europe* was left in an unfi-

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niſhed ſtate. During the laſt year of his life, the conduct of thoſe whom, in the ſimplicity of his heart, he regarded as men of integrity and honour, had almoſt entirely interrupted the courſe of his ſtudies. Certain bookſellers had not ſcrupled to publiſh a new edition of one of his works, although the copy-right had already reverted to the author. They truſted, no doubt, that in his diſtant retreat he would ſtill continue ignorant of their proceedings, and that their ſuperior opulence would ſecure them from the danger of legal reparation. The ſound of their many friendly profeſſions had lulled caution aſleep; and he at length became the dupe of his own generous and unſuſpecting diſpoſition. As he himſelf was incapable of fraud or deceit, he was not apt to guard againſt thoſe abhorred qualities in others. Although he had inveſtigated the general principles of human nature, yet his total ſecluſion from active life ſuffered him to remain almoſt entirely unacquainted with the habits and propenſities of mankind, as theſe diſplay themſelves in the leſs brilliant departments of civil ſociety. He was therefore utterly unprepared to maintain his rights againſt the concealed or open at-

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tempts of thoſe deteſtable Harpies who have always continued to infeſt the defenceleſs votaries of literature.

As we are not placed in our preſent ſtate of exiſtence, in order to delight our imagination with airy viſions, or our underſtanding with unavailing ſpeculations, it ought to be the firſt object of every individual to render himſelf competent for diſcharging the indiſpenſible duties of common life. The poet and the philoſopher muſt ſometimes deſcend from thoſe elevations which place them above the level of humanity. It behoves them frequently to withdraw their mind from contemplating the bright exemplars of perfection, and to fix their reluctant attention upon objects of a leſs ſublime nature. They muſt not turn a deaf ear to the calls of conſanguinity or friendſhip, and tranſport themſelves to a world of their own creation.

Dr Ruſſell was a man of indefatigable induſtry. Before he had perfected one ſcheme, another always preſented itſelf to his mind. Beſides two complete tragedies, entitled *Pyrrhus* and *Zenobia*, he left behind

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him an *Analyſis of Bryant's Mythology*, and the following unfiniſhed productions:

1. The Earl of Strafford, a tragedy.
2. Modern Life, a comedy.
3. The Love Marriage, an opera.
4. Human Happineſs, a poem intended to have been compriſed in four books.
5. A Hiſtorical and Philoſophical View of the Progreſs of Mankind in the Knowledge of the Terraqueous Globe.
6. The Hiſtory of Modern Europe, part III. from the peace of Paris in 1763, to the general pacification in 1783, including an Account of the American War, and of the European Tranſactions in the Eaſt-Indies. In a ſeries of letters from a nobleman to his ſon.
7. The Hiſtory of England from the beginning of the reign of George III. to the concluſion of the American War.

In the compoſition of the laſt of theſe works he was engaged at the time of his death. It was to be compriſed in three volumes octavo; for the copy-

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right of which Mr Cadell had ſtipulated to pay ſeven hundred and fifty pounds.

He probably intended to combine his general hiſtories in ſuch a manner as to form a complete view of the moſt remarkable tranſactions of mankind in the four grand diviſions of the globe. The proper execution of ſuch a project would require a longer term of years than the life of man now affords. Sir Walter Raleigh likewiſe formed the plan of a complete *Hiſtory of the World*; and the part which he has finiſhed manifeſts his vaſt comprehenſion of mind. But this is a ſcheme which could only have been brought to perfection by one of the anceſtors of Noah.

To enter into a minute examination of the merit of his various productions, would be a taſk productive of little advantage or entertainment. On the *Hiſtory of America* general commendation has already been beſtowed. The *Hiſtory of Modern Europe* is a judicious and intereſting epitome: and to it he is chiefly

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indebted for the rank which he now maintains in the republic of letters.

" If the preſent age (ſays Dr Stuart) cannot boaſt of many diſcoveries, it has at leaſt a right to value itſelf on its improvements. All the ſciences have been unfolded with a degree of perſpicuity and elegance unknown to any other æra; and every ſpecies of compoſition has received the laſt finiſhing of taſte. This remark is particularly applicable to hiſtorical productions. Modern hiſtory, now ſo animated and intereſting, was little better than a barren chronicle, or an indigeſted maſs of materials rudely thrown together

" To theſe obſervations we were naturally led by the peruſal of the work before us; in which the author has combined great hiſtorical accuracy, with a beautiful arrangement, and a happy ſelection of incidents. He endeavours to unite the vivacity of Voltaire, with the philoſophical ſpirit of Monteſquieu, and the political ſagacity of Bolingbroke. While he impregnates his narrative with ſtriking ſentiments and lively anecdotes, he enlightens the mind

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of the reader by ingenious remarks on the principles of government, or the ſcience of human nature *."

If his *Hiſtory of Ancient Europe* has obtained much leſs popularity, it ought to be remembered that this work labours under all the diſadvantages of an interrupted plan. The two volumes which he completed, contain a detail of Grecian affairs from the earlieſt dawn of hiſtorical record to the commencement of the Peloponeſian war. The hiſtory of Greece has been exhibited in ſuch a variety of lights by Stanyan, Goldſmith, Gaſt, Mitford, Robertſon, and Gillies, that it will be extremely difficult for an author who attempts the ſame ſubject, however intereſting it may be deemed, to attract any unuſual ſhare of public attention.

Ruſſell was a ſelf-taught ſcholar who, by unwearied application, had acquired a conſiderable fund of general knowledge. The extent of his acquaintance with ancient literature will be found to exceed

* European Magazine, vol. ii. p. 278.

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expectation; and he appears to have been tolerably ſkilled in ſeveral modern languages. What he himſelf knew, he poſſeſt the faculty of communicating in an agreeable manner.

Though he cannot be pronounced a profound and original writer, yet his merit as a general hiſtorian ſufficiently entitles him to that ſhare of attention which he has here received. This unadorned narrative may excite no unpleaſing ſenſations in the breaſt of ſome ingenuous youth whom fortune has miſplaced in the humbleſt vale of life. By drawing his reflections to the probable reſult of ſtrenuous and well-directed exertion, it may perhaps tend to inſpire him with the laudable ambition of excellence.

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POSTSCRIPT.

Wo worth the wicht that is not piteous,
Quhair the treſpaſſour penitent thay ſe.

DOUGLAS's Palice of Honour.

WHILE the preceding pages were in the hands of the printer, it was repreſented to the author that the information which he had obtained concerning Ferguſſon's expulſion from the univerſity was not entitled to any degree of credit. The confidence of this aſſertion excited farther inquiry; and the reſult is, that his original intelligence was partly authentic and partly erroneous. Ferguſſon, on account of ſome breach of academical rules, was formally expelled from the univerſity of St Andrew's; but in

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the ſpace of a few days he was again admitted to all the privileges which he had formerly enjoyed. The latter of theſe circumſtances had unfortunately eſcaped the recollection of the perſon upon whoſe authority the anecdote has been related.

For the correction of this ſtatement I am indebted to the politeneſs of a gentleman whoſe character, either moral or literary, will always be mentioned in terms of the higheſt reſpect. He was the fellow-ſtudent of Ferguſſon, and conſequently muſt have poſſeſt every opportunity of procuring the moſt authentic information.

In ſpeaking of thoſe individuals who have diſtinguiſhed themſelves both as lawyers and as poets, I have, by ſtrange inadvertency, omitted the illuſtrious name of GROTIUS.

To avoid faults is a work of greater difficulty than to expoſe them when committed. Theſe and ſimilar inſtances of precipitancy or ignorance, every one who reflects on the nature of his own mind will, without much heſitation, be induced to pardon.

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While they exercise the forbearance of the reader, they may afford a very salutary lesson to the writer. Notwithstanding his severity in criticizing the compositions of others, his own stand in need of every possible indulgence.

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